

The National  
Indigenous  
Economic  
Development  
Board

# The Indigenous Economic Progress Report

2024



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# The 2024 Indigenous Economic Progress Report

## Message from the Chair

On behalf of the National Indigenous Economic Development Board, I am pleased to present the 2024 Indigenous Economic Progress Report. This report is both an update to the 2019 Indigenous Economic Progress Report, along with the previous progress reports, and a review of trends in the Indigenous economy over the last 15 years. Using 2021 Census data as a benchmark, this report aims to identify, assess, and compare a series of core and underlying indicators related to Indigenous economic development.



Since its founding more than 30 years ago, the National Indigenous Economic Development Board has remained committed to advancing its vision of Indigenous economic self-sufficiency, prosperity, and the meaningful economic inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's economy. Keeping this vision in mind, I am pleased to share the progress made in Indigenous economic development since the release of the 2019 Report. This encouraging progress is a testament to the collective efforts, resilience, and determination that have propelled our communities forward.

Across our Indigenous Nations, there has been dynamic growth and innovation. From sustainable enterprises rooted in traditional knowledge, to groundbreaking ventures in technology and beyond, Indigenous entrepreneurs continue to demonstrate their ingenuity and resourcefulness.

Our partnerships, both within and outside our communities, have flourished, paving the way for inclusive economic development. Through collaboration with governments, corporations, and non-governmental organizations, we have amplified our voices and expanded opportunities for economic empowerment.

The data contained within this report matters. It matters for Indigenous Peoples and for all Canadians, including Governments, corporate Canada, small and medium-sized enterprises, institutions, as well as on the global stage. That being said, the Board believes that there is a need for better data collection to inform policy measures related to economic development. Better data will help policymakers focus their efforts and identify where change is needed.

Education remains a cornerstone of advancement for Indigenous Peoples. By advocating for quality education and skill-building programs, we are nurturing the next generation of Indigenous leaders and entrepreneurs. Through education, we are breaking down barriers and opening doors to new possibilities.

Moreover, we celebrate the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous cultures and languages, which are invaluable assets in today's global landscape. As we honor our traditions, we also embrace innovation, creating a unique blend of heritage and modernity that enriches our economic endeavors.

However, our journey is far from over. Challenges persist, and there is still much work to be done to ensure equitable access to economic opportunities for all Indigenous Peoples. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to address systemic barriers and foster environments where every member of our community can thrive. The National Indigenous Economic Development Board posits that much of the economic potential of Indigenous Peoples remains unrealized. Indigenous Peoples, and particularly those in rural and remote areas, require drastic action to close the persistent gaps with the non-Indigenous population.

I would like to thank the distinguished Indigenous academics who served on the Expert Advisory Panel for their invaluable insight and contribution to this report. The Expert Advisory Panel was struck to help inform key research questions, methodological needs, sources, and structure for the Report, as well as to connect Indigenous Services Canada and the National Indigenous Economic Development Board sub-committee with key stakeholders and Report end-users. Without their expertise and advice, this report would not have been possible. Of particular significance is a new addition to this report, the Foreword entitled, *"A Changed Landscape"* developed by David Newhouse and Dr. Wanda Wuttunee. For the first time, this report will include a historical evolution of the progress of Indigenous economic development to date.

Finally, I would like to sincerely thank our sub-committee, Dr. Marie Delorme, Michael Bonshor, and Andy Moorhouse for their invaluable guidance and advice in leading the development of this report.

Let us continue to build upon the foundation of progress we have laid, drawing strength from our shared heritage and the knowledge that together, we can achieve economic prosperity for generations to come.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dawn Mahdabee Leach". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dawn Mahdabee-Leach  
Chair, National Indigenous Economic Development Board

## The National Indigenous Economic Development Board

Established in 1990, the National Indigenous Economic Development Board is a national, non-partisan board mandated to advise the Government of Canada on Indigenous economic development issues. The Board holds a vision of vibrant Indigenous economies, characterized by economic self-sufficiency and socio-economic equality with the rest of Canada. Comprised of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis community and business leaders from across Canada, the Board plays an important role in helping the federal government develop and implement policies and programs that respond to the unique needs and circumstances of Indigenous Peoples. The National Indigenous Economic Development Board is committed to providing advice and guidance to the federal government on issues related to Indigenous economic opportunities that enable the Indigenous Peoples of Canada to have a voice in government policy.

Information about the National Indigenous Economic Development Board can be found at:  
**[www.niedb-cndea.ca](http://www.niedb-cndea.ca)**

The Board members are:

**Dawn Madahbee Leach**

Chairperson  
Aundeck Omni Kaning First Nation  
General Manager, Waubetek Business Development Corporation

**Victoria LaBillois**

Vice-chairperson  
Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation  
Principal, The Eloquent Hostess

Chief Terrance Paul  
Member-at-Large  
Membertou First Nation  
CEO, Membertou Development Corporation

**Dr. Marie Delorme**

Métis  
Chief Executive Officer, Imagination Group Inc.

**Maxime Vollant**

Innu First Nation of Pessamit  
Head of Indigenous relations at Rio Tinto-IOC mining company

**Sandra Sutter**

Métis  
Indie recording artist and filmmaker, ICD.D

**Andy Moorhouse**

Inuit  
Vice President of Economic Development, Makivik Corporation

**Bob Dickson**

Lac Seul First Nation  
CEO of companies owned by the Attawapiskat First Nation

**Michael Bonshor**

Dzawad'enuuxw First Nation of Kingcome Inlet  
President and CEO of Visions First Nations Financial Services/Ki'mola Indigenous Capital Managing  
Director of First Nations Business Development Association

**Dana Soonias**

Red Pheasant First Nation  
Director of Economic Development and Employment Training Services at the Saskatoon Tribal Council

**Danielle Levine**

Entrepreneur and owner of Danielle Levine Consulting

**Crystal Martin**

Inuit  
Co-founder of Indigenous Geographic

The NIEDB would like to thank former Board members **Hilda Broomfield Letemplier** and **Ruth Williams** for their contributions to this report.

## The Expert Advisory Panel

In the early planning stages of the development of this report, Indigenous Services Canada and the NIEDB Indigenous Economic Progress Report sub-committee assembled an Expert Advisory Panel to help inform key research questions, methodological needs, sources, and structure for the Report, as well as to connect Indigenous Services Canada and the National Indigenous Economic Development Board sub-committee with key stakeholders and Report end-users. All members of the Expert Advisory Panel were chosen through a rigorous selection process and are independent from government or decision-makers. Members of the Expert Advisory Panel have used previous reports and their expertise in the field to inform recommendations and advice related to the development of the 2024 Report.

### Panel Members

#### **David Newhouse**

David Newhouse is Onondaga from the Six Nations of the Grand River community near Brantford, Ontario. He is a Professor of Indigenous Studies at Trent University in the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies and a Professor of Business Administration at the School of Business Administration. He served as Chair of the Department of Indigenous Studies, now the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies, from 1995 to 2023.

His research interests focus on the emergence of modern Indigenous society. He is the founding editor of two peer-reviewed journals: the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers *Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development* and *Aboriginal Policy Studies*, a journal devoted to urban Indigenous issues. He is also the editor of seven books on Indigenous issues and the author of 25 book chapters, 50 journal articles, and more than 150 keynote invited talks.

In 2024, he received the Lee Lorch Award for excellence in research, teaching and service from the Canadian Association of University Teachers. He received the Jackie Muldoon Award for Faculty Service in 2023, a 3M National Teaching Fellowship for teaching innovation in 2022, and the Trent University Teaching Award for Educational Leadership and Innovation in 2016. He is the Chair of the Aboriginal Peoples Post-Secondary Working Group at CAUT and the Grievance Officer for the Trent University Faculty Association.

#### **Dr. Mary Beth Doucette**

Dr. Mary Beth Doucette, Ph.D., MBA, B.Eng.: Associate Professor, Community Economics, Tourism, and Indigenous Business Department, and the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies, Cape Breton University. She is Mi'kmaq/Canadian from Unama'ki' (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia) and Membertou community member. She holds the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies at Cape Breton University's Shannon School of Business. Her research is focused on Indigenous-led business Community Economic Development, policy administration, and curriculum development. Drawing from her training as an industrial engineer and project manager, she works with organizations that strive to use collaborative co-learning approaches to integrate an Etuaptmumk/Two-Eyed Seeing lens throughout their operations. She was honored to be appointed as the Co-Chair of the Bras d'Or Collaborative Environmental Planning Initiative in the spring 2023.

### **Dr. Mark S. Dockstator**

Dr. Mark S. Dockstator is an associate professor at Trent University, Chanie Wenjack School of Indigenous Studies, and former President of the First Nations University of Canada. A member of the Oneida Nation of the Thames, he received his doctorate in law from Osgoode Hall Law School, York University.

Dr. Dockstator has senior leadership experience in both the public and private sector, having served as the founding Chairman First Nations' Statistical Institute, a federal Crown corporation, Special Advisor to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, Director of Mediation and Special Advisor to the Chief Commissioner of the Indian Land Claims Commission, President and CEO of Rama Economic Development Corporation and Senior Negotiator and Researcher for the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

Dr. Dockstator has a great deal of business experience and has a specific research expertise in Indigenous issues, having served as Principal Investigator on an array of national and regional research projects in areas such as health, treaties, languages and culture, education and economic development.

Dr. Dockstator also serves on a number of national organizations including the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (where he is a Board member and co-chair of the advisory committee to the President), Rideau Hall Foundation (Board member and co-chair of the Indigenous Teacher Education initiative), Board Chair of the Canadian Museum of Nature Foundation and Board Chair for Teach for Canada.

### **Dr. Deborah Saucier**

Dr. Deborah Saucier was appointed President and Vice-Chancellor of Vancouver Island University in July 2019. Dr. Saucier holds a PhD in psychology from the University of Western Ontario and a BSc and MSc in psychology from the University of Victoria. She received her International Baccalaureate diploma from the Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific in Metchosin, near Victoria.

Prior to joining VIU, Dr. Saucier was President of MacEwan University in Edmonton and Provost and Academic Vice-President of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. Dr. Saucier is a distinguished researcher in both psychology and neuroscience. She was the Canadian Research Chair in Behavioural Neuroscience at the University of Lethbridge and Dean of Science at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology and has garnered numerous grants to support her research, including awards from Natural Science and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation.

Dr. Saucier is also the author of two books in psychology and an advocate for women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

At Vancouver Island University, Dr. Saucier has guided the development and implementation of the institution's first strategic plan. The plan includes three core values – People, Place and Potential – and six commitments for the next five years. Following the guidance of the plan, Dr. Saucier is working to build on the institution's strengths and fostering the unique educational experience at VIU to be more accessible, more inclusive, and more deeply rooted in community.

Born in Saskatoon, Dr. Saucier is a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta. In 2020, she was awarded the Indigenous Women in Leadership Award from the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. As president of Vancouver Island University, Dr. Saucier is focused on helping to close the education gap for Indigenous youth and working to incorporate the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration)*, *BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA)*, and the TRC Calls to Action

into institutional decision making by implementing both policy and physical changes on campus to ensure that Indigenous cultures and knowledges are reflected in campus spaces.

Dr. Saucier is married to curator and contemporary artist Chai Duncan and has a teenage daughter.

### **Dr. Wanda Wuttunee**

Dr. Wanda Wuttunee, Professor Emerita, is an internationally known professor and researcher in the field of Canadian Indigenous economic development. For more than 40 years, Dr. Wuttunee has developed a research agenda based on understanding how Indigenous values interact with capitalist values. She considers gender issues as well as the role of culture and tradition in mainstream business, through social enterprises and co-operatives. The term “community capitalism” captures her emphasis on the need for economic development to be in sync with Indigenous community visions. Her work brings to the forefront the many different ways in which Indigenous peoples are contributing to the Canadian economy. Her recent co-edited work entitled *Engraved on our Nations: Indigenous Economic Tenacity* celebrates Indigenous economic resilience.

### **Michelle Corfield, D.M., M.A., B.A.**

Michelle holds a Doctorate degree in organizational leadership, a Masters degree in Conflict Analysis and Management and a Bachelors degree in First Nations studies. She is one of the owners of BC Cannabis Inc and Corfield & Associates Consulting services and Steveston Marine. She is the Co-Founder of the Indigenous Business and Leadership MBA at SFU.

Michelle has a proven track record of innovative facilitation, mediation and governance process design.

In addition to serving 8 years on Nanaimo Port Authority as Board Chair and Board Member of Fortis BC, her past experience includes:

- Chair of the Legislative Council of the Ucluelet First Nation
- Director on the Board of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC and;
- Executive in Residence at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia.

Michelle has served on multiple Indigenous, Provincial, Federal and Municipal Boards of Directors and Committees and brings a wealth of experience and cross-sectoral knowledge to her work.

### **Matthew Pike**

Matthew Pike is a Nunatsiavut Inuk originally from Happy Valley – Goose Bay, Labrador. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and Aboriginal Studies (Memorial University), a Master of Jurisprudence in Energy Law degree (University of Tulsa), and a PhD in Population Medicine (University of Guelph), where he focused on the complex relationship between mining and Inuit well-being.

Matthew currently is employed in a global role with mining and metals company, Rio Tinto, where he advises on all matters relating to Indigenous and community agreements. Prior to joining Rio Tinto, Matthew held leadership roles with Vale, Astaldi Canada, and Nalcor Energy in the Indigenous and community relations space. Also, Matthew completed a short-term assignment with the Indigenous Peoples Secretariat of the Arctic Council while living in Norway and Finland. Matthew joined the



National Indigenous Economic Development Board's Expert Advisory Panel in October 2020 and provided advice until March 2024.

Matthew currently resides in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, with his wife, Jillian, and young daughter, Hannah.



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# Executive Summary

The 2024 Indigenous Economic Progress Report is the fourth installment by the National Indigenous Economic Development Board. This report updates and assesses key economic indicators for Indigenous populations in Canada, using data from the 2021 Census and beyond. It aims to track progress, identify gaps, and inform policy decisions to foster Indigenous economic prosperity. Since the inception of the 2012 Economic Benchmarking report, substantial progress related to Indigenous economic development has been made, however the journey towards economic parity for Indigenous Peoples in Canada continues.

The report focuses on "Core and Underlying Indicators" critical for determining Indigenous economic progress.

- **Core Indicators:** Employment, Income, Community Well-Being.
- **Underlying Indicators:** Education, Entrepreneurship, Governance, Lands and Resources, Infrastructure.

From 2012 to 2020, all measured economic indicators showed a growing Indigenous economy. At the national level, Indigenous gross domestic product and output as well as jobs held by Indigenous Peoples posted positive growth every year since 2012. The only exception was in 2020, mainly because of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. All provinces and territories also saw their main economic indicators increase during the 2012 to 2020 period. The number of Indigenous entrepreneurs is also rising, with self-employment rates increasing among First Nations, Métis, and Inuit since 2016.

Despite this growth, persistent systemic barriers and gaps remain, and efforts to promote Indigenous self-sufficiency and socioeconomic parity must be sustained. What if these gaps were closed? What if education and training opportunities were expanded? What if Indigenous workers enjoyed the same access to economic opportunities as non-Indigenous workers? Just how much more could the Indigenous labour force contribute to the Canadian economy, if gaps in average employment income and employment rate were eliminated?


To estimate this, in 2012, the value of GDP attributable to Indigenous output was estimated at \$81.9 billion and by 2020, the value had grown to \$97.0 billion, representing a growth of 18.5%. Every year prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous gross domestic product experienced growth, from \$41.7 billion in 2012 to \$54.1 billion in 2019. This figure represents the significant contribution that Indigenous Peoples have towards the overall Canadian economy. The National Indigenous Economic Development Board remains committed to advancing economic reconciliation and recognizes that much of the economic potential of Indigenous Peoples remains unrealized.

Beyond these figures, several key themes have emerged throughout this iteration of the report:

***The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted employment rates and labour force participation rates, and men and women experienced these effects differently.***







The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant and multifaceted impacts on the economic outcomes of Indigenous Peoples. For example, Indigenous Peoples faced higher rates of job losses and unemployment during the pandemic and many Indigenous workers are employed in sectors like hospitality, retail, and tourism, which were heavily impacted by lockdowns and restrictions.

Reduced working hours and job losses led to significant income reductions for many Indigenous families, exacerbating existing economic disparities. In addition, Indigenous-owned businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, experienced closures or severe disruptions due to the pandemic. Limited access to capital and financial resources in comparison to non-Indigenous business-owners also made it difficult for these businesses to survive prolonged periods of reduced revenue.

Many Indigenous businesses also struggled to adapt to new market conditions, such as shifting to online sales or implementing health and safety protocols, due to limited digital infrastructure and resources found in remote Indigenous communities.

From a gendered perspective, in 2021, the unemployment rate for Indigenous men was 6.3 percentage points higher than for non-Indigenous men, while for Indigenous women, it was 3.8 percentage points higher than for non-Indigenous women. Since 2016, the gap has decreased: previously, it was 9.7 percentage points for men and 6.0 percentage points for women

***The experience on-reserve impacts labour force participation, and the gap is widening at an alarming rate.***


Employment rates for First Nations on reserve remain the lowest, at 19.9 percentage points lower than non-Indigenous rates, though the gap is narrowing as non-Indigenous employment rates fell during the pandemic. As of 2021, the employment rates were 50% for Indigenous populations compared to 57% for non-Indigenous populations.

Among the distinction groups, Métis historically have higher labour force participation rates than non-Indigenous people, and this gap has been further reduced. Inuit populations experienced a drop in labour force participation, widening the gap with non-Indigenous people.

In the 15 years since the 2006 Census, the labour force participation rate gap between First Nations on reserve and non-Indigenous individuals has increased by 22.8%. This is a significant increase over time and represents a concerning trend that highlights the growing disparity in economic opportunities and workforce inclusion for Indigenous communities on reserves. This widening gap underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions and policies to address the systemic barriers that continue to hinder the economic participation of First Nations people on reserves.

***Despite overall income growth, significant gaps persist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, particularly in rural areas.***

Despite overall income growth over the years, significant gaps persist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, particularly in rural areas. Métis populations continue to have the highest income levels, while First Nations on-reserve earn the lowest. As previously mentioned, the employment experience on reserve may impact income levels.



Some of the increase of income levels may be due to dependency on government transfers, which remains high, especially among First Nations on-reserve and Indigenous women.

***Community well-being scores have been on the rise.***

The Community Well-Being Index is a useful tool to demonstrate gaps and improvements in socio-economic status. The report identifies a need for better data collection to inform policy measures related to economic development, including an emphasis on developing culturally aligned indicators for measuring community well-being, with a focus on factors such as health, environment, language, and social connections.

There has been a long-term increase in Community Well-Being scores for First Nations, with notable improvements from 2016 to 2021. Conversely, Inuit communities have seen long-term gains but short-term declines, widening the gap in Community Well-Being scores.

***High-school achievement rates are on the rise, with the exception of Inuit, and a significant gender gap persists.***

Education, historically used as a tool for assimilation through residential schools, now stands as a pivotal factor for economic development and well-being. The report emphasizes the importance of education in improving employment and income levels and advocates for increased training and internship opportunities to sustain these gains.


High school completion rates have improved for all Indigenous identity groups except Inuit between 2006 and 2021. Location significantly affects educational attainment, with lower completion rates in remote areas with Indigenous women having higher completion rates than Indigenous men.

Indigenous-controlled educational programs and institutions, such as Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey in Nova Scotia, have shown remarkable success, with high school graduation rates reaching 95%. This is evidence that incorporating Indigenous culture, language, and history into the curriculum has positively impacted students' educational achievement, identity formation, and mental health.

***While no new Comprehensive Land Claims and Self-Government Agreements have been signed since the 2019 Economic Progress Report, significant progress has been made in recognizing Indigenous rights and protecting lands.***

The significance of Indigenous access and management of traditional territories cannot be overstated, as it forms the bedrock of cultural identity, traditional knowledge, and ceremonial practices. The autonomy to govern their lands is crucial for Indigenous Peoples to fully benefit from economic development opportunities.

The implementation and adherence to land based agreements have deteriorated over time, with many obligations not being honored. Efforts to address historical injustices and fulfill treaty obligations have been implemented, however no new Comprehensive Land Claims and Self-Government Agreements have been signed since the 2019 Economic Progress Report. Despite this, significant progress has been made in recognizing Indigenous rights and protecting Indigenous lands. For instance, the period from



2015 to 2017 saw an average of 15 claims resolved per year, but in 2022-23, a record 56 claims were resolved, totaling \$3.5 billion in compensation.

***Non-Indigenous businesses dominate the Canadian economy, however Indigenous Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises outperform broader Canadian Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in terms of sales revenue and growth.***

Non-Indigenous businesses dominate the Canadian economy, comprising 98.68% of private enterprises and 97.17% of self-employed entrepreneurs. This dominance highlights the ongoing disparity, with the gap not showing signs of narrowing.

Despite these challenges, Indigenous entrepreneurs contribute approximately \$48.9 billion to the Canadian economy, a figure that could increase if systemic barriers, such as limited access to federal procurement opportunities, are addressed. Analysis of Indigenous firm size reveals that most Indigenous firms have few or no employees, with a significant portion consisting of sole entrepreneurs and small firms (1-4 employees). Notably, Indigenous small and medium enterprises are outperforming the broader Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises in terms of sales and revenue growth.

***Indigenous youth hold significant potential to increase economic parity.***

Indigenous youth hold significant potential to address labour shortages in Canada due to their growing population. Despite this, they face considerable barriers, including higher rates of incarceration, child apprehension, and suicide compared to non-Indigenous youth. Nonetheless, there are slow improvements in employment indicators for Métis youth, nearing parity with non-Indigenous youth.

***Better data collection, cultural preservation and increased support are identified as invaluable assets to economic development.***

While substantial progress has been made in various areas, there is more work to be done to address barriers and achieve economic parity for Indigenous Peoples in Canada. In light of this, the report underscores the need for better data collection, cultural preservation and increased support to foster Indigenous economic parity with the rest of Canada.

The *Indigenous Economic Progress Report* includes 70 recommendations and 22 strategic considerations aimed at fostering sustainable growth and prosperity within Indigenous communities. These recommendations are designed to empower Indigenous Peoples, promote self-determination, and create opportunities for economic advancement. The recommendations put forward are related to the “Core and Underlying” indicators found within the report.

Implementing the recommendations contained within the *Indigenous Economic Progress Report* in a collaborative and culturally sensitive manner, supports the economic empowerment and self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, paving the way for sustainable development and prosperity for generations to come.



### **Summary of Recommendations:**

In light of the extensive analysis and comprehensive review of Indigenous economic development initiatives contained within this report, a set of recommendations and considerations aimed at fostering sustainable growth and prosperity within Indigenous communities have been formulated. These recommendations are designed to empower Indigenous peoples, promote self-determination, and create opportunities for economic advancement. The recommendations are related to the “Core and Underlying” Indicators found within this report.



## Introduction

The *2024 Indigenous Economic Progress Report (IEPR)* is the fourth report in a series released by the National Indigenous Economic Development Board (NIEDB).

This report will serve as an update with respect to the “Core and Underlying Indicators” that have been identified as foundational and intersecting aspects that support Indigenous economic prosperity. These indicators are as follows:

- Core Indicator #1: Employment
- Core Indicator #2: Income
- Core Indicator #3: Community Well-Being
- Underlying Indicator #1: Education
- Underlying Indicator #2: Entrepreneurship
- Underlying Indicator #3: Governance
- Underlying Indicator #4: Lands and Resources
- Underlying Indicator #5: Infrastructure
- Additional data on entrepreneurship, income, education for on-reserve and northern communities from the Indigenous People’s Survey

## Previous Reports

In June 2012, the NIEDB released the *Aboriginal Economic Benchmarking Report*. It marked the first ever comprehensive effort to identify, assess, and compare a series of core and underlying indicators, and represented the first attempt to capture the state and progress of the Indigenous economy in Canada. The NIEDB undertook this report with the purpose of tracking and assessing the economic development of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, identifying gaps in outcomes, and measuring the Government of Canada’s progress in implementing the Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development.

The *2015 Aboriginal Economic Progress Report* demonstrated that between 2006 and 2012, small gains had been made towards the 2022 target. For example, gaps between the Inuit population and the non-Indigenous population were reduced for unemployment rates and average income, and employment and participation rates for the Métis population were slightly higher than the non-Indigenous population. Despite these achievements, however, the report revealed that large gaps remained between the core and underlying social and economic indicators of Canada’s Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. The 2015 Report stressed the importance of accelerating economic progress if the 2022 goal set by the NIEDB was to be met.

The 2019 *IEPR* continued to track economic outcomes for all three Indigenous identity groups compared with those of the non-Indigenous populations, with data broken down by identity group, and distinguishing between on and off-reserve populations. Findings revealed that although gains had been made in several indicators, significant gaps still remained between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in most indicators.

## Focus

Continuing the work of the 2019 *IEPR*, the 2024 *IEPR* will track how economic outcomes for all three Indigenous identity groups compared with the non-Indigenous population of Canada.

## Purpose

The 2024 *IEPR* has three main objectives:

1. To present comparative information on the evolution of the economic outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples compared to the benchmarks identified in 2012 and to include additional data where available;
2. To continue identifying variations in the evolution of economic outcomes among Indigenous identity groups (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) and, where possible, between First Nations on and off reserve, compared to benchmarks set in 2012;
3. To continue informing federal policy and program direction.

## Timing

The majority of the data collected within this report stems from the 2021 Census questionnaire, which collected information from individuals in May 2021. As per typical practice, the release of the various reports coincides with the data collected from the most recent census (e.g., the 2019 *IEPR* reported on 2016 Census data). The timing of this particular report has interesting implications due to the state of the world in May 2021. The global impact of COVID-19 has been profound, affecting various aspects of daily life. These impacts include, but are not limited to, health care disruptions, vaccine developments, and major global economic impacts.

The timing of the Census and the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted survey participation rates and data findings, particularly given that four provinces in Canada were on lockdown during the Census collection timeframe. Additionally, many of the Indigenous populations who lived on reserve remained on lockdown or in a state of emergency for a longer period of time – representing the majority of the Census timeframe. As such, this report serves as a snapshot of a very complex time that must be understood in the context of an international pandemic and must be taken into consideration when making assumptions regarding trends.

## Indigenous Identity Groups

In the land now known as Canada, and within the *Constitution Act, 1982*<sup>1</sup>, there are three recognized Indigenous<sup>2</sup> identity groups: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. Each group is tremendously diverse and rich with their own languages and culture, with each population navigating distinct economic landscapes. This report compares data on identity groups that are based on individuals' self-identification in the 2016 and 2021 Census of Population in Canada. See **Annex B** for further statistics on the Indigenous population in Canada and details on Indigenous identity.

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<sup>1</sup> Branch, L. S. (2023, January 19). *Consolidated federal laws of Canada, the Constitution Acts, 1867 to 1982*. Legislative Services Branch.

<sup>2</sup> The term "Aboriginal" is used throughout the *Constitution Act, 1982*, however it is more widely accepted by communities to use "Indigenous" or "Indigenous Peoples".

## Gender-Specific Data

The reader will note throughout this report that gender-specific data has been incorporated into each chapter, consistent with the government's commitment to gender-based analysis plus (GBA+), which explores the dynamics and intersections between identity groups. Intersectionality acknowledges that identity categories, such as gender, race, class, and beyond, are intersecting, and that one's social position, circumstances, and treatment within broader society can be impacted by more than one system of oppression. The report aims to examine the dynamics between identity groups and the context in which people live, and to acknowledge the unique historical, cultural, political, and socio-economic realities of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. Given its focus on the socio-economic barriers and outcomes experienced by Indigenous women and men, who occupy more than one identity category, this report employs GBA+ analysis. For the purposes of this report, the availability of data beyond the intersections of Indigenous men and women, is limited, or statistically insignificant. The Board recognizes that solely reporting on Indigenous men and women in the context of GBA+ is insufficient and will work towards advocating for the availability of inclusive data going forward.

## Ministerial Mandate Commitments

The political relationship between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples is complex and ever-changing. In 2021, the following statements were included in all Ministerial Mandate Letters:

- "... I am directing every Minister to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to work in partnership with Indigenous Peoples to advance their rights."
- "... I expect you to include and collaborate with various communities, and actively seek out and incorporate in your work, the diverse views of Canadians. This includes women, Indigenous Peoples, Black and racialized Canadians, newcomers, faith-based communities, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ2 Canadians, and, in both official languages."

## Residential School Mass Grave Discoveries

In May 2021, Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc First Nation announced that the remains of as many as 215 children were found around the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia. According to the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, there would have been up to 500 Indigenous students from across the entire province registered at this school. Since then, many other First Nations Communities have searched residential school sites in their territories. The impact has been felt by all Indigenous Peoples; Métis, Inuit, and First Nations Communities have all been deeply affected by Canada's residential school system. These discoveries have nationally increased a societal and political awareness of the history of Indigenous Peoples in the country. Increasingly diverse strategies for reconciliation are underway in many regions beyond British Columbia and this shift has had social and economic implications.

## Indigenous Economic Development

The advancement of Indigenous economic development is an integral piece of reconciliation, as well as the overall growth of the economy in Canada. The mandate of the NIEDB is to inform and advise the federal government, however the recommendations put forward in this report are addressed to all levels of government across the entire country. It is anticipated that this report will be a valuable tool for

understanding the Indigenous economy in Canada for community leaders, researchers, students, and all those interested in economic reconciliation.

## A National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada

The *National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada (NIES)* is the blueprint to achieve the meaningful engagement and inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian economy. The Calls to Economic Prosperity recommend specific actions to achieve the outcomes and represents a strategy that others can incorporate into their own strategic plans.

The 2019 *IEPR* identified the importance of Indigenous procurement, access to capital, capacity development, and wealth sharing as main components to economic prosperity. However, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted further inequities that Indigenous communities face in Canada. While national efforts and initiatives are resulting in progress across the country, it is insufficient and will take commitment, creativity, and innovation to make meaningful change.

These key areas also resonate with the findings and data found in the 2019 *IEPR* as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action which identify key components of economic reconciliation such as respectful relationships, equitable access to opportunities, and education of non-Indigenous management in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and antiracism.

To address these issues, the NIEDB worked in partnership with national Indigenous organizations to develop a *National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada*. Officially released in June 2022, the strategy provides a coherent vision designed to guide efforts in Canada and is based on the following four key pillars:

- People
- Land
- Infrastructure
- Finance

The four pillars within the strategy are a blueprint for all levels of government in Canada to implement the proposed reforms to health, education, justice, and economic institutions, and serve as a guide for supporting Indigenous economic inclusion. The *NIES*, the *IEPRs*, the TRC's Calls to Action, *United Nations Declaration Act (UNDA)* Action Plan Measures, and other public reports aimed at improving the overall outcomes for Indigenous Peoples in Canada, are meant to complement each other as they pave a way forward for economic prosperity for Indigenous communities.

## Fiscal Realities

In 2024, the NIEDB published a report entitled "Economic Reconciliation: Growing Canada's Economy" which found that despite holistic labour shortages across the country, closing the significant opportunity gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians would boost Canada's economy by \$26.7 billion annually. This represents a significant and ongoing economic impact that could be realized with the right investments in education, training, and equal access to economic opportunities.

Closing the average employment income gap and the employment rate gap would contribute to closing the poverty rate gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations as well. This would mean



an estimated 151,252 fewer Indigenous persons living in low income and a net impact reduction on all government budgets of roughly \$6.7 billion.

Numerous groups have raised the important aspect of focusing on Indigenous workers, and specifically Indigenous youth, as an important element to address labour force productivity challenges seen today. Statistics Canada data shows that labour productivity of Indigenous workers that have completed apprenticeships, trade certificates or diplomas exceeds that of non-Indigenous workers with the same post-secondary training, as demonstrated by slightly higher average employment incomes. This demonstrates that with improved education, training, and other investments, the labour productivity gap can be closed, and equivalent average employment incomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers can be achieved.<sup>3</sup>

## Celebrating Success

Across Canada, Indigenous Peoples continue to create innovative socio-economic opportunities for their communities. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities are taking their future into their own hands, exercising their jurisdictional authorities, and strengthening their communities as true Nations. See **Annex C** for a list of success stories from Indigenous Peoples across Canada. It is no surprise that businesses that are fully or partially Indigenous-owned will improve the lives of Indigenous individuals and communities, and in turn will give a valuable contribution to advancing economic development.

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<sup>3</sup> Fiscal Realities Economists. (2024). *Economic Reconciliation: Growing Canada's Economy*

*The NIEDB expresses its gratitude to David Newhouse, Associate Professor, Business Administration Chair, Indigenous Studies, Trent University and Dr. Wanda Wuttunee, professor and director, Aboriginal Business Education Partners, Asper School of Business, who offered their generous and insightful feedback to develop this comprehensive foreword which outlines the historical evolution Indigenous economic development.*

## Foreword: A Changed Economic Development Landscape

**Dr. Wanda Charles, University of Manitoba**  
**David Newhouse, Trent University**

The quantitative data presented in this report charts the progress of Indigenous<sup>4</sup> economic development. The data are driven by a series of actions that have been taken by Indigenous governments, communities, and institutions to improve the financial and life circumstances of Indigenous citizens. This chapter focuses on these actions.

### The Changed Landscape – The context of 2023

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's was mandated with investigating the problems and offering solutions affecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. RCAP's ultimate focus was on ways of improving a variety of relationships – Indigenous, government and Canadian society. Through a vast array of research involving critical Indigenous input – unique to that point- 440 recommendations were made for a grand plan that if embraced, was predicted to have transformational positive change for all.

The Indigenous economic development landscape in 2023 is significantly different from that described by the RCAP, nearly 30 years ago. A 20-year review of the RCAP legacy<sup>5</sup> tracked impressive changes and illuminated the continuing deficits in the story of this Nation's relationships with Indigenous Peoples. The grand plan was not taken up as offered. As is often the case, while the issues remained with same, it was the overall landscape and context that deservedly garnered attention. There is now a significant infrastructure of Indigenous economic organizations including businesses. Indigenous entrepreneurship is a recognized and supported economic activity. This new landscape is characterized by the recognition of Indigenous economies and self-determined economic and community development strategies, new economic development institutions, a wide variety of Indigenous economic support organizations, Indigenous capital corporations, sector associations and a host of post-secondary education programs in business and economic development. Changes in the law surrounding land has led to a set of First Nations land management organizations. Mainstream organizations have developed or realigned their services to implement Indigenous support and development strategies. Federal and provincial governments offer a wide variety of support programs. The business community have developed a series of advisory councils that provide advice on Indigenous relations and programming. At the international level, several new organizations are fostering Indigenous trade and investment.

The rapid growth of the Indigenous population and its subsequent aging into the workforce (18-65 years of age) underpins the urgency and importance of Indigenous economic development. Indigenous well-

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<sup>4</sup> The term Indigenous has been adopted as the way to recognize the diversity of the original inhabitants of this land. Indian is a legal term defined by the Indian Act. Aboriginal is a constitutional term defined the Canada Constitution Act, 1982. Indigenous is a policy term used in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous peoples, 2007. Each term is used in this chapter in a manner appropriate to its historical and policy context.

<sup>5</sup> Newhouse, D., & Graham, K. (2021). *Sharing the Land, Sharing a Future*.

being is increasingly described through the lens of Mino-Bimaadiziwin (Anishinaabe) or Pimatisiwin (Cree) captured in part by the Community Well-Being Index developed by Indigenous Affairs in 2004. Mino-Bimaadiziwin/Pimatisiwin describes a life that balances all four elements of existence: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Development viewed through an Indigenous lens is expected to improve levels of education, both formal and cultural, improve incomes, improve housing and community infrastructure, improve and sustain the function of local Indigenous governments as well as improve general social conditions and rebalance power relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Development is more than just closing the economic gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. It is also expected to support Indigenous values about land as well as contribute to Indigenous cultural development.

One fundamental change that has occurred over the last half century is the object of public policy on Indigenous economic development is now the Indigenous economy itself - which is now described as a market-based entity. There is a growing recognition that there is not one single Indigenous economy but that there are now several regional economies with distinct characteristics such as large non-market sectors. *RCAP* described four distinct types of Indigenous economies: The Territorial North, The Provincial North, Southern Rural and Urban. It outlined a series of steps that could be undertaken by Indigenous Peoples to regain control of their economies and ensure smooth functioning in providing economic benefits to their citizens. The recommendations are consistent with those set out in *Wahbung: Our Tomorrows*<sup>6</sup> and represent the leadership consensus about development strategy.

One of the central aspects of *Wahbung* was a securing of land to be used as a homeland and as a foundation for development. The Indian Claims Commission and the Supreme Court Calder Decision started a land reclamation process that is still underway. *Wahbung* also asserted that Indigenous development should be under the control of Indigenous leaders and be based on comprehensive community development plans.

These directions were taken up by a decade later by the 1989 Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy (CAEDS) which focused on improving Indigenous participation in the Canadian economy rather than the development of Indigenous economies. The CAEDS strategy of community development and Indigenous economic institutional development fostered the emergence of a set of Indigenous economic institutions that are now part of the changed landscape.

The 1975 Dene Declaration fostered recognition of a long-held view that Indigenous Peoples were nations, a view based on the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The 1985 *Penner Report* brought forward the idea of 'First Nations'; an idea that was supported by the 1996 *RCAP* report which recommended the support for the emergence of Indigenous nations. As part of its work, the *RCAP* policy team incorporated the research of the Harvard Project on Indian Economic Development. This project used the idea of "Indian Nation" to frame its findings about how to best support Indigenous reservation economic development in the United States.

The Harvard Project stressed the importance of self-determined economic development activities and the development of local Indigenous economic institutions to support development. Canadian Indigenous leaders advocated for the support of these types of economic institutions and a move to expand project-based funding programs to institution support programs. The range of economic institutions that have emerged over the last thirty years has been impressive.

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<sup>6</sup> *Wahbung: Our Tomorrows*, the Indian Tribes of Manitoba, October 1971, Manitoba Indian Brotherhood Inc. - 1971

In October 2023, the Bank of Canada described the Indigenous economy as growing with Indigenous workers expected to contribute significantly to the Canadian labour market in the future. The Bank did not comment on the distinctions-based approach, nor did it comment on the emergence of urban communities as distinct economic entities.

## What has changed over since the 1996 RCAP Report?

The 1996 *RCAP* report, like *Wahbung* before it, presented Canadians with a comprehensive approach to improving the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Canada. While it focused on the larger political relationship, it also contained recommendations for the economic development of Indigenous communities. The *RCAP* recommendations represented a consensus view of self-directed, Canada supported economic development that involved restoration of jurisdiction over land, increased education and training, and establishment of Indigenous economic development institutions as foundational. The report fostered a large impetus for change.

This section focuses on four key changes that have made a difference and that provide confidence that the indicators in this report will continue to show improvement.

### 1. Indigenous economies

It is now accepted that there are economic entities characterized as Indigenous economies that are distinct and connected to local Canadian and International economies. Indigenous economic development is now more than individual entrepreneurship development and is seen as an important element of self-government as well as redress and reconciliation. The development of Indigenous economies is now guided by community development plans prepared by local governing authorities.

The research of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (now the Harvard Project on Indigenous Governance and Development) supported the assertion of *Wahbung* that economic development worked best when it was under the guidance of Indigenous Peoples and their institutions, using their own cultural traditions to create a stable decision-making environment. The project advocated for the use of a nation-building model to Indigenous economic development; a model that has subsequently been adopted by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit leaders in Canada. The foundational contribution of the Harvard project was support for an Indigenous economy that was developed by Indigenous leaders through their own institutions.

It is important to recognize the major contribution that Indigenous entrepreneurs and small businesses have made over the last half century. In 2020, Statistics Canada examined the gross domestic product (GDP) attributable to Indigenous output and estimated that it was about \$97 billion, growing from 81.9B in 2012.

### 2. Distinction based approach

Indigenous economies are now seen as constitutional and based in distinct rights-holding entities: First Nation, Inuit, Métis. A pan-Indigenous approach that doesn't recognize cultures, traditions, histories, lands and legal and/or treaty rights as important foundational elements for development is no longer acceptable. Unfortunately, the largest group of Indigenous Peoples who live outside their home communities, comprising more than 60% of the population have been largely ignored.

### 3. Indigenous institutions

There is now an infrastructure of Indigenous economic support organizations: Indigenous capital organizations, Indigenous education and training Institutes, Indigenous community- developed and

guided development strategies, Indigenous land management regimes and regulations, Indigenous business, Indigenous economic development organizations and Indigenous sector and trade organizations. Indigenous land claims agreements and treaties contain economic development provisions and Indigenous benefit agreements are now part of this new institutional landscape. The final section of this chapter provides examples of this new landscape.

#### **4. The legal environment**

The legal environment has changed considerably with a set of Supreme Court decisions that define Aboriginal rights including definitions of Aboriginal title. Land claims settlements and modern treaties spell out Indigenous governance structures and processes as well as defining land rights and creating new collaborative frameworks and protocols for Indigenous participation in local economies. Provinces have also become more involved in Indigenous affairs appointing Ministers responsible for Indigenous relations. Indigenous Peoples have been advocating for governments to adopt the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration)* and make it a part of the legal governance framework. In BC, the *UN Declaration* is now part of the legal landscape and at the federal level, the *UN Declaration Act* is influencing the actions of government officials and departments.

#### **5. Attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples**

In the three decades since the *RCAP* report, Canadian and corporate attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples have moved from seeing Indigenous Peoples only through the ‘lens of problem’ to seeing and recognizing their strengths as a foundation for rebuilding and strengthening economies. While there remains considerable debate about the assimilation-acculturation approach to Indigenous affairs and relations, most Canadians and corporations see the benefit of supporting a self-determination policy framework. In the post TRC era, Indigenous Peoples are seen as important political actors whose needs must be recognized and supported by governments and citizenry.

### **Academic Attention and Research**

Research into Indigenous economies and economics has advanced considerably beyond external reports by governments and universities documenting Indigenous social and economic conditions: The 1966 Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies (Hawthorn et al, 1966) and the 1979 Report: An overview of Demographic, Social and Economic Conditions Among Canada’s Registered Indian Population (Andrew Siggner). The last two decades have seen the emergence of Indigenous economic research and development institutions like the Tulo Centre of Indigenous Economics, a partnership between the First Nations Taxation Centre and Thompson Rivers University, the Indigenomics Institute, a stand-alone Indigenous economic research institute, and the National Consortium for Indigenous Economic Development at the University of Victoria. Several universities have appointed Professors of Indigenous economics, or Indigenous businesses, or Indigenous law, and have created research groups on Indigenous economics.

University researchers, Indigenous research institutes and mainstream Canadian institutes are developing academic literature exploring the emerging Indigenous economy as well as documenting its contribution to provincial and Canadian economies. In 2022, the World Economic Forum published a report on the reshaping of modern economies by Indigenous Peoples. The *Cando Journal of Aboriginal Economic Development* has been publishing articles on Indigenous economic development for 25 years. Recent academic literature describes Indigenous economics through the lens of Indigenous knowledge.

Policy discussions in Indigenous, provincial, territorial, and national governments are now likely to be informed by Indigenous-led research that advances an Indigenous understanding of economics as by reports from mainstream economists.

The TRC Call to Action 62 has led to curricular changes in the education of young people about Indigenous Peoples. Students at all levels are learning about Indigenous cultures, histories, languages and aspirations as well as Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous economics. Some post-secondary institutions have introduced mandatory Indigenous content courses either across the institution or in selected programs.

## Public Attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Peoples in Canada have been the object of systemic racism in all sectors of Canadian society. The impacts of economic racism, which hindered Indigenous participation in the Canadian economy, are still felt. The economic institutions previously described are starting to make a difference in public attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples. Reports such as the *RCAP*, the *Final Report of the TRC* and the *Report of the National Inquiry into MMIWG* along with the various reports that document discrimination in health care and the justice system are working to create a development climate that is different from the past. There is increasing recognition that Indigenous Peoples economic conditions are not their own making and that they need a hand up rather than a handout.

Polling firms such as Environics and IPSOS report important changes in public attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples since the 2015 *Final Report of the TRC*. The relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Canadians is seen as improving but still needing more constructive dialogue, discussion, and education. In terms of economic development, a 2021 poll by IPSOS found that Canadians believe that Indigenous participation in the natural resource sector would provide good economic and employment benefits, but that governments and natural resource companies were not doing a great job at facilitating Indigenous involvement. However, all believed that they were doing a better job than 10-20 years ago. About half of Canadians believe that Indigenous Peoples should have full control over development on their territory. A 2020 NANOS-Assembly of First Nations survey found that Canadians are more likely to say that Canada is doing a better job at addressing Indigenous issues than in 2015.

## Emergence of Indigenous Businesses and New Institutions

Since 1996, there has been significant growth in Indigenous-owned businesses and Indigenous economic institutions. While entrepreneurs and businesses form the foundation of an economy, developing an economy requires the collective effort of a wide variety of institutions: The *economic development corporation* has become the preferred choice of development institution; *Indigenous finance and capital organizations* secure easier access to capital; and *Indigenous sector organizations* work to create opportunities in specific economic sectors. A large set of *Indigenous economic support organizations* has also emerged to provide training, development and management advice and *Indigenous post-secondary Institutions and academic programs* to educate entrepreneurs and help students build business and management skills for an Indigenous workforce. The Council for the Development of Economic Development Officers (Cando) has offered the only Indigenous community-based certification program for economic development officers for the last three decades.

Statistics Canada (2020) reports that there are 50,000 Indigenous owned companies who contribute \$48.9B to the economy of Canada. This number is up from an estimated 37,000 Indigenous-owned ones in 2018. 94% of these businesses were controlled by First Nations people and Métis. Inuit owned 1.6% of them. Increasingly, Indigenous women are business owners with young Indigenous people owning businesses at higher rates than non-Indigenous-owned businesses.

Indigenous businesses are found in all sectors of the economy. See **Annex D** for a list of examples of Indigenous owned companies and organizations in Canada.

## Conclusion

Almost three decades after the *RCAP* report, a half-century after the foundational Indigenous policies in the 1970s and a decade after the *TRC* report, it is possible to see the emergence of expanded federal and provincial policies, jurisprudence that recognizes Indigenous title to land and its use in economic development and a set of Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations that are designed to support Indigenous economic development. Attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples that enable and support distinct development strategies while fostering links to regional and national economies are changing and represent promise that the future will look very different from the past.

The significant development of Indigenous economic development institutions since the 1996 *RCAP* report provides optimism for the future of the Indigenous economy. Our understanding of this economy is still limited. For example, climate change will force a move away from non-renewable resources and require the development of new development strategies and economic sectors. A recent federal government-funded initiative – Luminary under the direction of Indigenous Works – will focus on new collaborations and innovative strategies in Indigenous economic development. Academic research will be aligned with the needs of communities, business school curricula will bridge knowledge gaps for faculty and students as well Indigenous scholarship will be supported.

**For additional details on the political, legal and economic context impacting Indigenous communities in Canada, please refer to Annex B.**

## CORE INDICATOR #1: EMPLOYMENT

*“Until there is a strong First Nations economy, there will not be a vibrant national economy. To achieve our full potential together, we must start by decolonizing the Canadian economy, making substantive space for First Nations as equal partners, and ensuring there are adequate opportunities for First Nations to participate.”*

– Assembly of First Nations National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak

### Employment Highlights

#### Labour Force Participation Rate Gap

- Since the 2006 Census, the labour force participation rate gap has increased by 0.5 percentage points between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people, with the 2021 gap being 4.4 percentage points. The Métis population demonstrates the strongest labour force participation rates, even under pandemic conditions, at 2.2 percentage points above non-Indigenous Canadians, a trend since 2006.
- The labour force participation rate for the First Nations population in 2021 is 8 percentage points below the non-Indigenous population. The participation rate continues to be lowest for First Nations on reserve, with the 2021 Census demonstrating an increasing gap with non-Indigenous rates at 18.3 percentage points. For First Nations off reserve, the gap with the non-Indigenous population is 4.2 percentage points. Inuit populations who had seen an improvement in labour force participation levels previously, saw these levels drop, increasing the gap with the non-Indigenous population to 7.3 percentage points.
- The gender gap in labour force participation rates decreased between 2016 and 2021 for the Indigenous population but increased for the non-Indigenous population. The Indigenous labour force participation rate gender gap in 2021 is 4.8 percentage points, a decrease from the 5.9 percentage point gap in 2016. For the non-Indigenous population, the gender gap is 11.8 in 2021, and was 8.7 in 2016.



#### Employment Rate Gap

- In 2021, the employment rate gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population was 6.9 percentage points, a decrease from the 8.4 percent gap in 2016. Employment rates continue to be lowest for First Nations on reserve, at 19.9 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate, however the gap is narrowing as non-Indigenous employment rates fell during the pandemic. For the total First Nations population, First Nations off reserve, and Inuit populations, the percent gap with the non-Indigenous population in 2021 is 10.7, 7.3 and 11, respectively. The Métis population had a 0.3 percent higher employment rate than the non-Indigenous population in 2021, similarly observed in 2006.
- Employment rates are typically higher amongst men than women, however, this gender gap is smaller amongst the overall Indigenous population than the non-Indigenous population at differences of 3.1 and 7.7 percentage points, respectively. This is consistent with the 2016 data, where the employment rate of non-Indigenous men was 7.3 percentage points higher than that of non-Indigenous women, but 2.1 between Indigenous men and women.
- For all identity groups, the employment rate is highest in census metropolitan areas, followed by population centres then rural areas in order of highest to lowest.



#### Unemployment Rate

Canadian unemployment rates overall increased between 2006 and 2016 and the trend continues with the 2021 national Census. The highest unemployment rate was 18 percent for the Inuit population, a 7.9 percentage point gap with the non-Indigenous population. Métis had the lowest unemployment rate of the Indigenous population at 12.8 percent, a 2.7 percentage point gap with the non-Indigenous population. Overall, the unemployment rate of the Indigenous population is 5 percentage points higher than the non-Indigenous population, and the percent gaps with First Nations (total), First Nations on reserve and off reserve is 6.3, 7.7 and 5.9, respectively.

#### COVID-19

COVID-19 impacts on employment rates and labour force participation play an important role in impacting the figures throughout this chapter. The Labour Force Surveys conducted between December 2019 and August 2021 demonstrate that non-Indigenous people returned to the labour force before their Indigenous counterparts, showing a quicker recovery from pandemic shutdowns. Further, Indigenous Peoples were over-represented in occupations with larger employment declines during the pandemic such as hospitality, retail and information.



## Indigenous Employment Rate

The employment rate measures the percentage of the total population age 15 years and older that is employed and earning an income. It is an important measure to assess economic progress, as a higher rate of employment signifies an increasing purchasing power and less dependency on government transfers.

The Census was distributed in May 2021. It should be noted that although the census date was completed one year into the COVID pandemic, pandemic-related employment losses had not fully recovered, and overall employment levels were still reduced. Also, in May, at the time of the Census, tighter public health restrictions continued or were introduced in several provinces, including stay-at-home orders in Ontario, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Alberta. In contrast, New Brunswick and Quebec eased restrictions in some regions through late April and early May; these issues impacted employment levels, causing challenges in data interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

While the COVID-19 pandemic had significant socio-economic impacts on Indigenous Peoples as a whole, it had varying effects on Indigenous men and women, respectively. While Indigenous men and women experienced similar labour market impacts during the first three months of the pandemic, employment levels for Indigenous women have not recovered at the same rate as for men. Gender trends in the employment and unemployment rates were driven by labour market conditions, but particularly by the extent to which parents had to adjust their labour force participation to balance work and family obligations. The decline in labour force participation was greater for Indigenous women as they are more likely to engage in unpaid work such as caring for children, especially during school closures, and for other family members.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, within industries hit hardest by job losses, women experienced a disproportionate share of these losses compared to men.<sup>9</sup>

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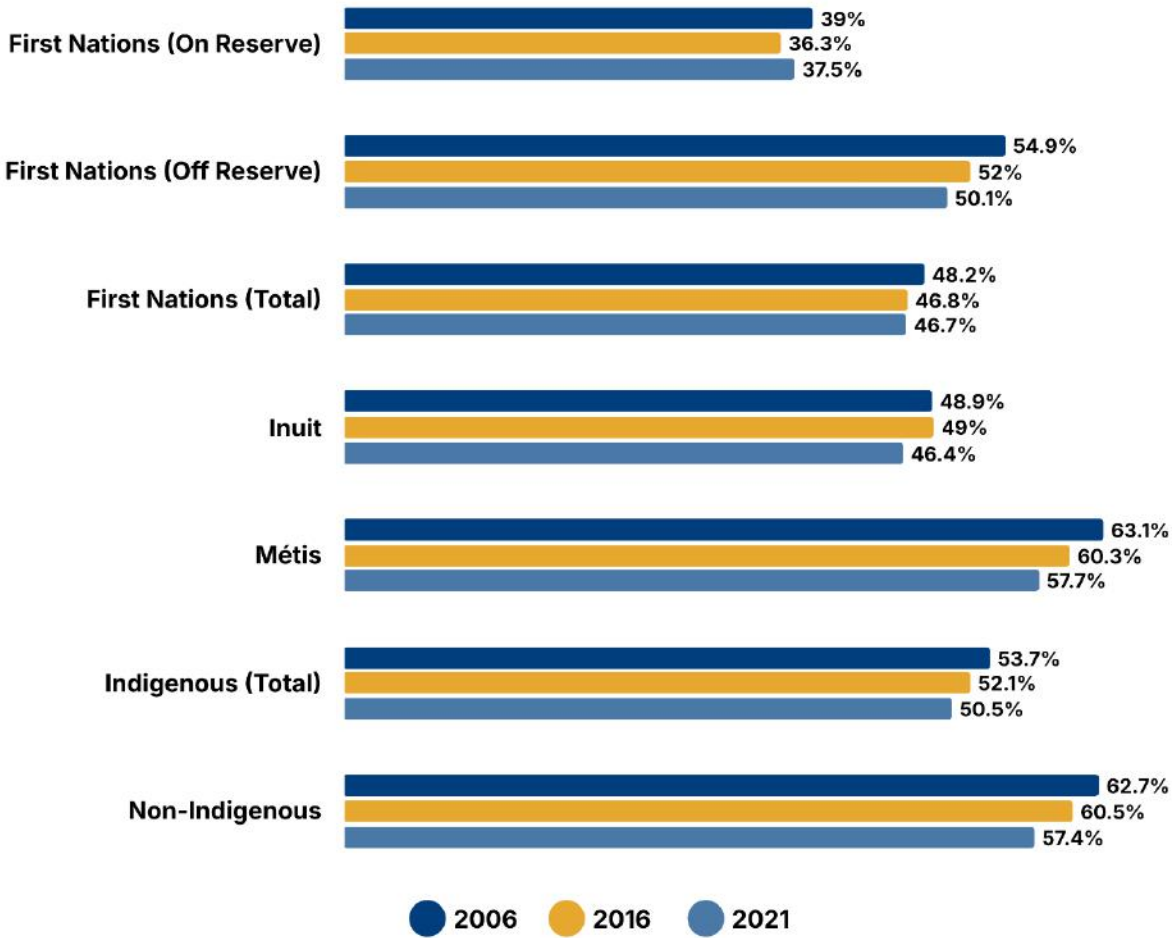
<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada. (2021, June 4). *Labour Force Survey, May 2021*.

<sup>8</sup> Bleakney, A., Masoud, H., & Robertson, H. (2020, November 2). *Labour market impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous people: March to August 2020*. Statistics Canada.

<sup>9</sup> Royal Society of Canada. (2022). *Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women in Canada*.

Figure 1: Employment Rate (15 Years and Older) by Indigenous Identity, 2006, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Employment Rate (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and ISC's Census 2021

In the 2019 *IEPR*, it was noted that overall Canadian employment rates decreased from 2006 to 2016.<sup>10</sup> Not surprisingly, employment rates in 2021 dropped further, with the exception of the First Nations on reserve who observed a 1.2% increase in employment rates (Figure 1). While evidence of the reasoning behind this increase is not readily available, it may be due to employment opportunities in pandemic support (e.g., vaccination or other medical assistance, perimeter setting and securing, community safety opportunities, etc.). Beyond these figures, the employment rate continues to be lowest for First Nations on reserve, with 19.9 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate (Figure 1). As the non-Indigenous employment rate fell over three percentage points, the gap between non-Indigenous and First Nations on reserve narrowed (Figure 2). Beyond the 2021 data, it should be noted that First Nations on reserve typically experience the lowest employment levels. This may be in part due to a number of factors

<sup>10</sup> Labour force status data are collected in one 'reference week' of Sunday, May 2, to Saturday, May 8, 2021 (for example, persons who were employed, unemployed, not in the labour force, unemployment rate, participation rate and employment rate). Information is not an annual average.

that may decrease the desirability of jobs typically found on reserve, compared to off reserve. For example, on-reserve taxation regimes result in First Nations receiving lower pay for on-reserve jobs. The taxation regime also impacts pensions by lowering one's overall salary. This makes on-reserve jobs far less competitive and forces employees to seek more advantageous jobs elsewhere.

An example of a First Nation that has made significant strides in this area is Membertou First Nation. As detailed in their annual report, in terms of pay scale competitiveness, Membertou's approach aligns with industry standards. They have voluntarily entered into agreements that benefit participating First Nations through revenue sharing and training opportunities. This strategic focus ensures that Membertou remains a thriving and forward-thinking community, attracting tenants and fostering growth.<sup>11</sup>

Statistics Canada and the United Nations also found Indigenous people were over-represented in occupations that experienced larger employment declines during the pandemic<sup>12</sup> and that financially vulnerable individuals and/or groups experienced an increased risk of adverse socio-economic impacts due to public health measures taken to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This was largely experienced by Indigenous people in urban settings.<sup>13</sup> Frequently, they held positions which could not be done remotely, or their work was suspended because of the pandemic.

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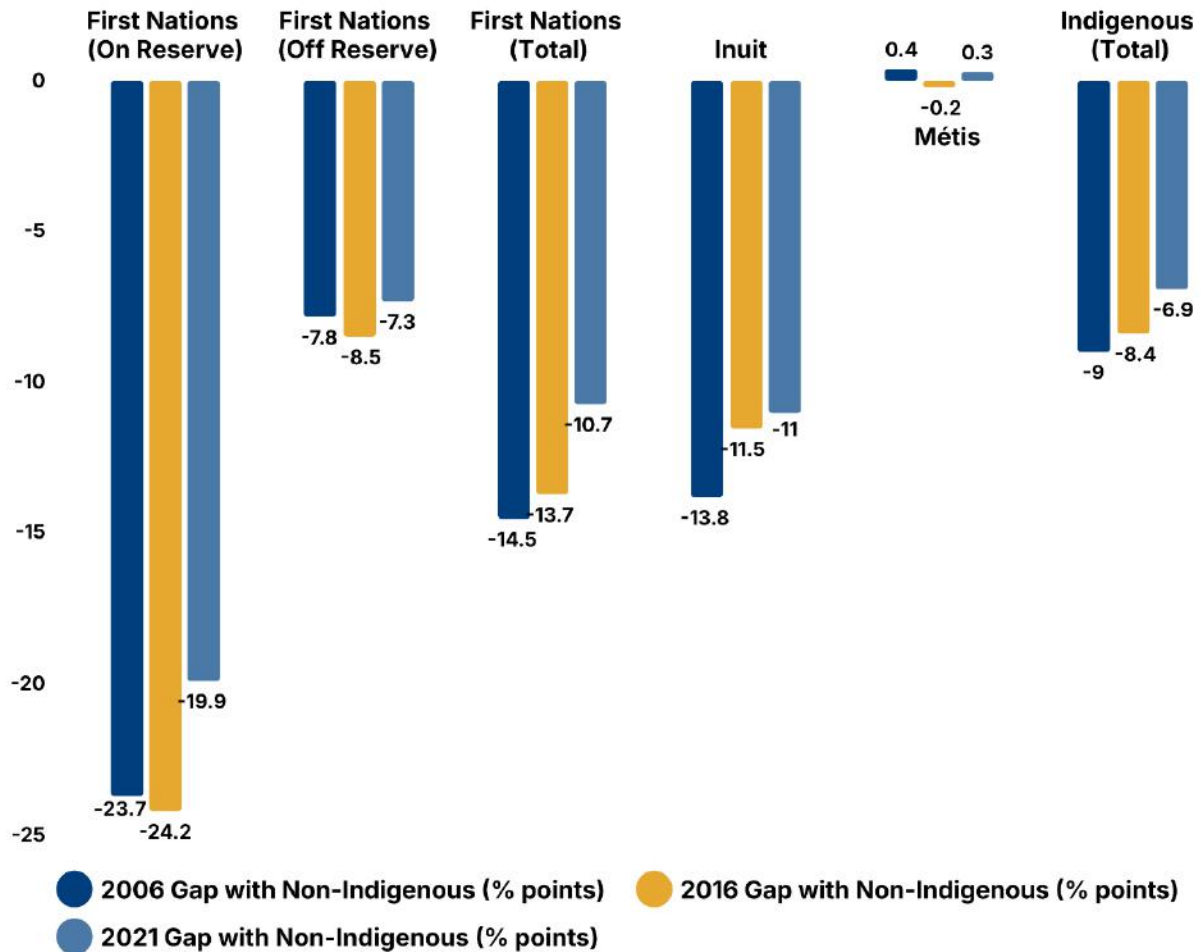
<sup>11</sup> Membertou First Nation. (2020). *Making our Mark.: Annual Report 2018-2019*.

<sup>12</sup> Bleakney, A., Masoud, H., & Robertson, H. (2020, November 2). *Labour market impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous people: March to August 2020*. Statistics Canada.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations. (2020). *COVID-19 and Indigenous peoples*.

Figure 2: Indigenous Employment Rate Gap with Non-Indigenous

## Employment Rate Gap with Non-Indigenous



Source: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and ISC's Census 2021

In a report prepared for the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, it was found that during the pandemic period, three industries accounted for 80 per cent of job losses in Canada: hospitality; information, culture and recreation; and retail trade. In the 2016 and 2021 census, racialized people were overrepresented in

## MIXED ECONOMY

these sectors and therefore experienced more labour impacts. These industries also experience a slower recovery post-pandemic.<sup>14</sup>

In the spring of 2020, with increased awareness of racialized experiences of the pandemic, Statistics Canada began, for the first time, to collect Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for racialized Canadians. They recognized that Census numbers are not reflective of the true state of the Indigenous economy given that many Indigenous people participate in the land-based economy, which includes trapping, fishing, and hunting, and would not have been impacted by pandemic restrictions. This type of economy contributes to a community's economic well-being; however, it is not captured through the Census. The newly created Labour Force Statistic surveys also provide further insight into the urban Indigenous employment levels pre-pandemic through to August 2021, when most pandemic shutdowns had lifted. Unfortunately, data was unavailable for Indigenous reserve communities and Inuit communities.

When comparing a six-month period from March to August 2021 to figures from 2019, employment among Indigenous people had recovered for all major occupation groups and surpassed pre-pandemic levels (Figure 3).

Recognizing the economic value of participation in the traditional economy in the North, many people balance their participation in the wage economy with their roles in social economy of land-based activities. This impact was quantified in research done by the MakeWay foundation which studied the social impact of employing a full-time community hunter for the community of Clyde River. The study determined that for every \$50 invested, the result was enough country food (e.g., caribou, char) to feed 20 individuals. In comparison, \$50 would only buy meat to feed less than 4 people through the commercial retail economy.

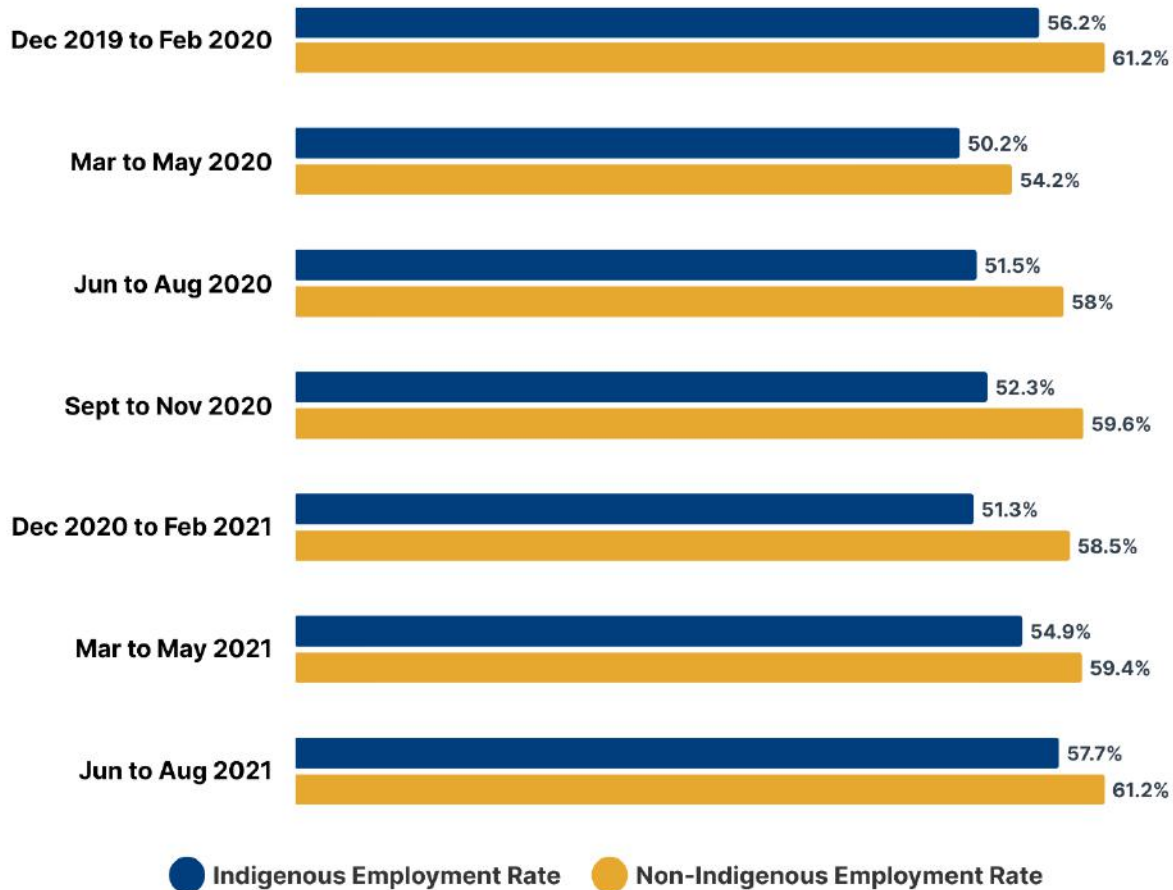
Source: MakeWay. (2024). *Impact Story: Community-led hunter/harvester programs are a food sovereignty solution in Nunavut.*

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<sup>14</sup> Alook, A., Block, S., & Galabuzi, G.-E. (2021). *A Disproportionate Burden: COVID-19 labour market impacts on Indigenous and racialized workers in Canada*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Figure 3: Employment Rate Comparison Indigenous vs. Non-Indigenous

## Employment Rate Comparison Indigenous vs. Non-Indigenous



Source: Statistics Canada. Labour Force Survey.

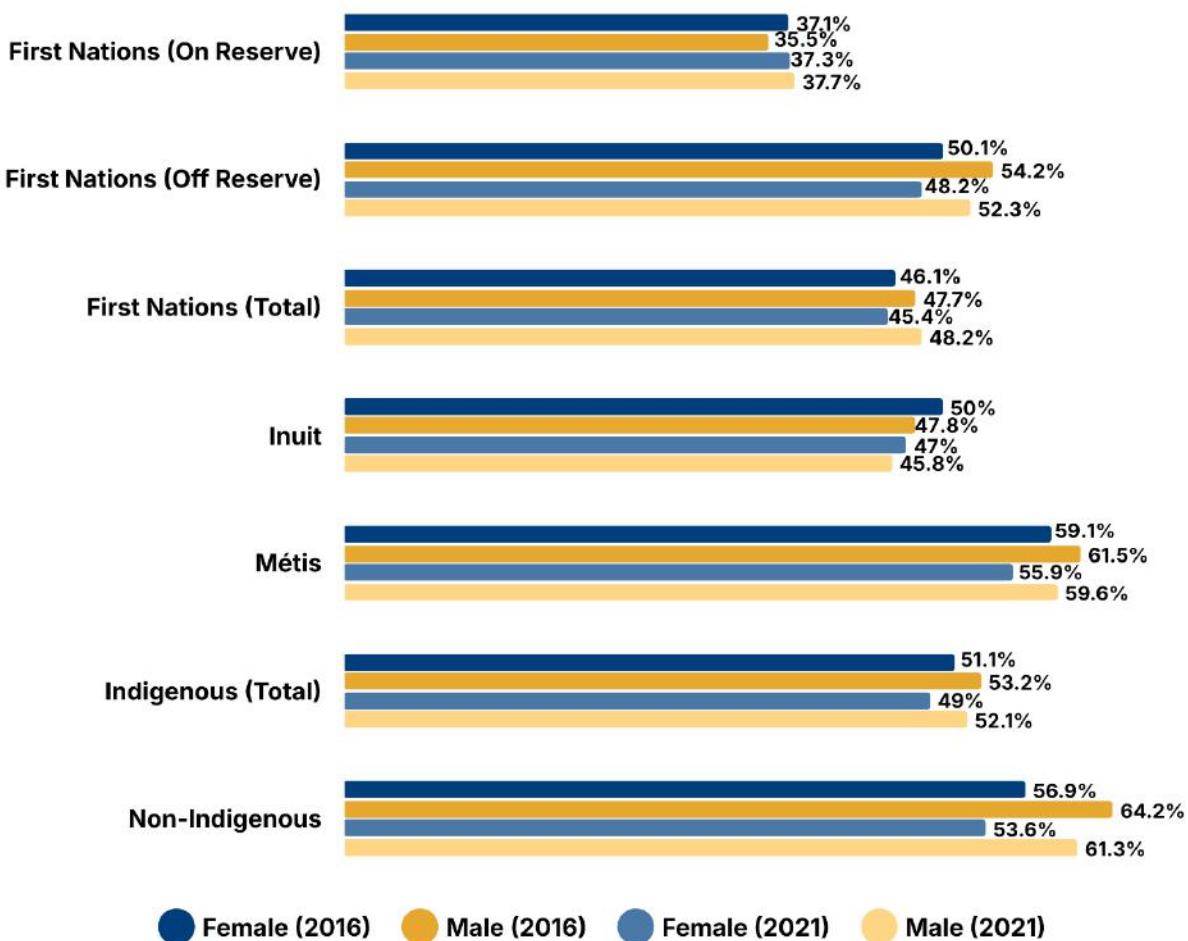
### Gender-Specific Data on Employment Rate

In both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, men generally experience higher rates of employment than women. However, the size of the gap is different between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. In 2021, there was a gap of 7.7 percentage points between the employment rates of non-Indigenous men and women. In comparison, the employment rate gap between men and women in the overall Indigenous population was 3.1 percentage points. This is consistent with the 2016 data, where the employment rate of non-Indigenous men was 7.3 percentage points higher than that of non-Indigenous women, but 2.1 for the overall Indigenous population (Figure 4). The reasons for the difference in the employment gender gap between the overall Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations are poorly understood and likely the result of various contributing factors. These factors could perhaps include the difference between matriarchal versus patriarchal social orders, greater gender equity within

Indigenous identity groups,<sup>15</sup> differences in age demographics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, and higher levels of unemployment among Indigenous men despite higher labour force participation rates than Indigenous women.

Figure 4: Employment Rate (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Employment Rate (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021



Source: Census 2016, 2021.

- Employment rates are typically higher amongst men than women, however, this gender gap is smaller amongst the overall Indigenous population than the non-Indigenous population.
- Inuit women have higher employment rates than their male counterparts.
- The employment rates of Métis men and women are higher than those of non-Indigenous men and women.

Data shows a widening of the gap between the employment rates of Indigenous men and women since 2016, which is consistent with that of the non-Indigenous population. That being said, the gender gap still

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women & Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. (2010). *Gender and Indigenous Peoples*.

remains smaller in Indigenous employment rates, and in some cases, it is reversed. In 2021, Inuit women had an employment rate of 47.0%, compared with 45.8% of Inuit men. The smallest gap is seen among First Nations on reserve, where women have an employment rate of 37.3%, compared to 37.7% for men.

2021 data revealed a slight narrowing of the employment rate gap since 2016 between Inuit and the non-Indigenous population by 0.5 percentage points. This narrowing is smaller than that of 2.3 percentage points seen between 2006 and 2016. This can be broken down by gender into a change in the gap between Inuit and non-Indigenous men of 0.9 percentage points and a change in the gap between Inuit and non-Indigenous women of 0.3 percentage points. Métis men continue to exhibit the highest employment rate among men across Indigenous identity groups, slightly below that of non-Indigenous men. As was the case in 2016, the employment rate of Métis women exceeds that of non-Indigenous women (Figure 4).

## Indigenous Labour Force Participation Rate

The labour force participation rate is the percentage of the population aged 15 years and older that is either employed or unemployed and looking for work. This indicates the availability of labour supply and the potential output that it can generate. A positive labour force participation rate can be a contributor to economic growth.<sup>16</sup>

During 2021, there was a significant drop in the labour force participation, with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic strongly influencing findings.

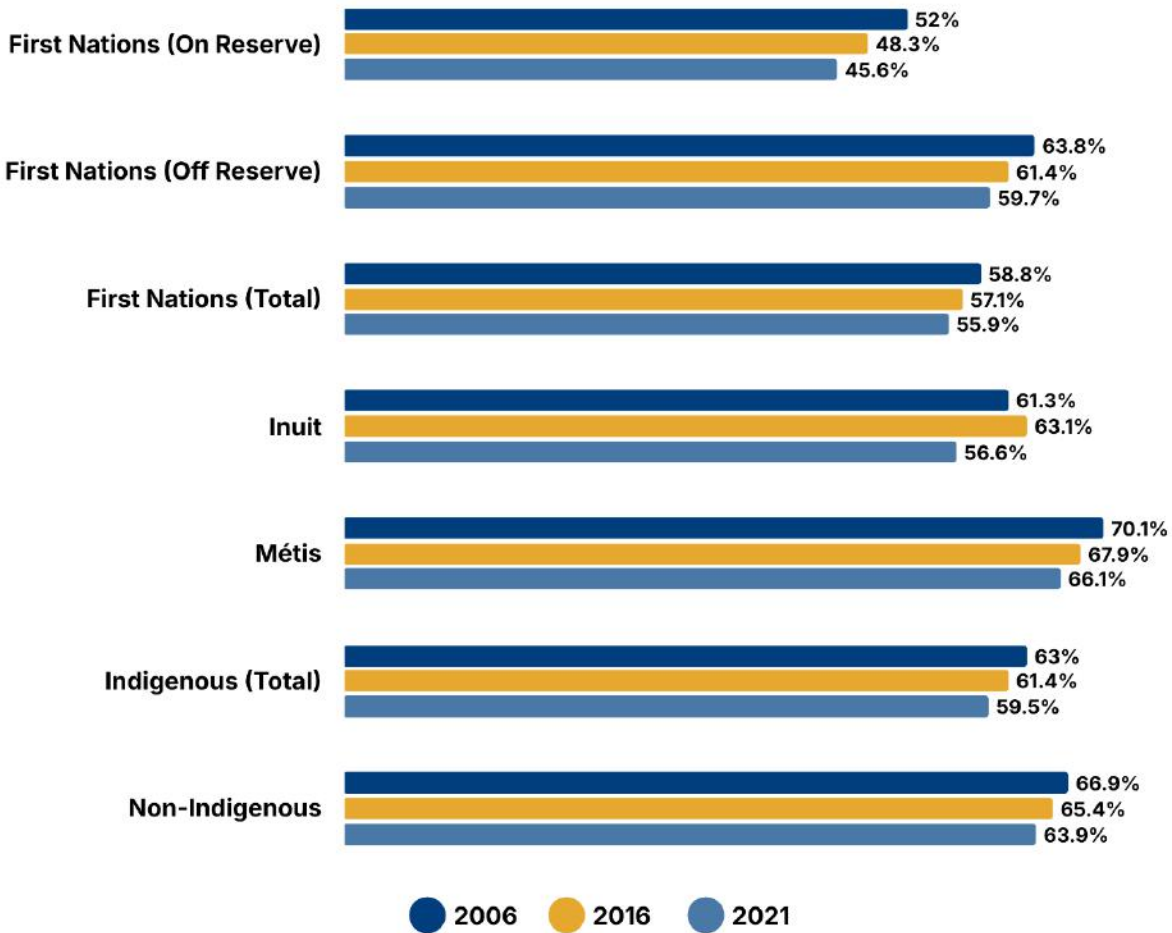
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<sup>16</sup> The Labour Force Participation Rate is calculated by dividing the number of people ages 16 and older who are employed or actively seeking employment by the total non-institutionalized, civilian working-age population.



Figure 5: Labour Force Participation Rate (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016, and 2021, Canada

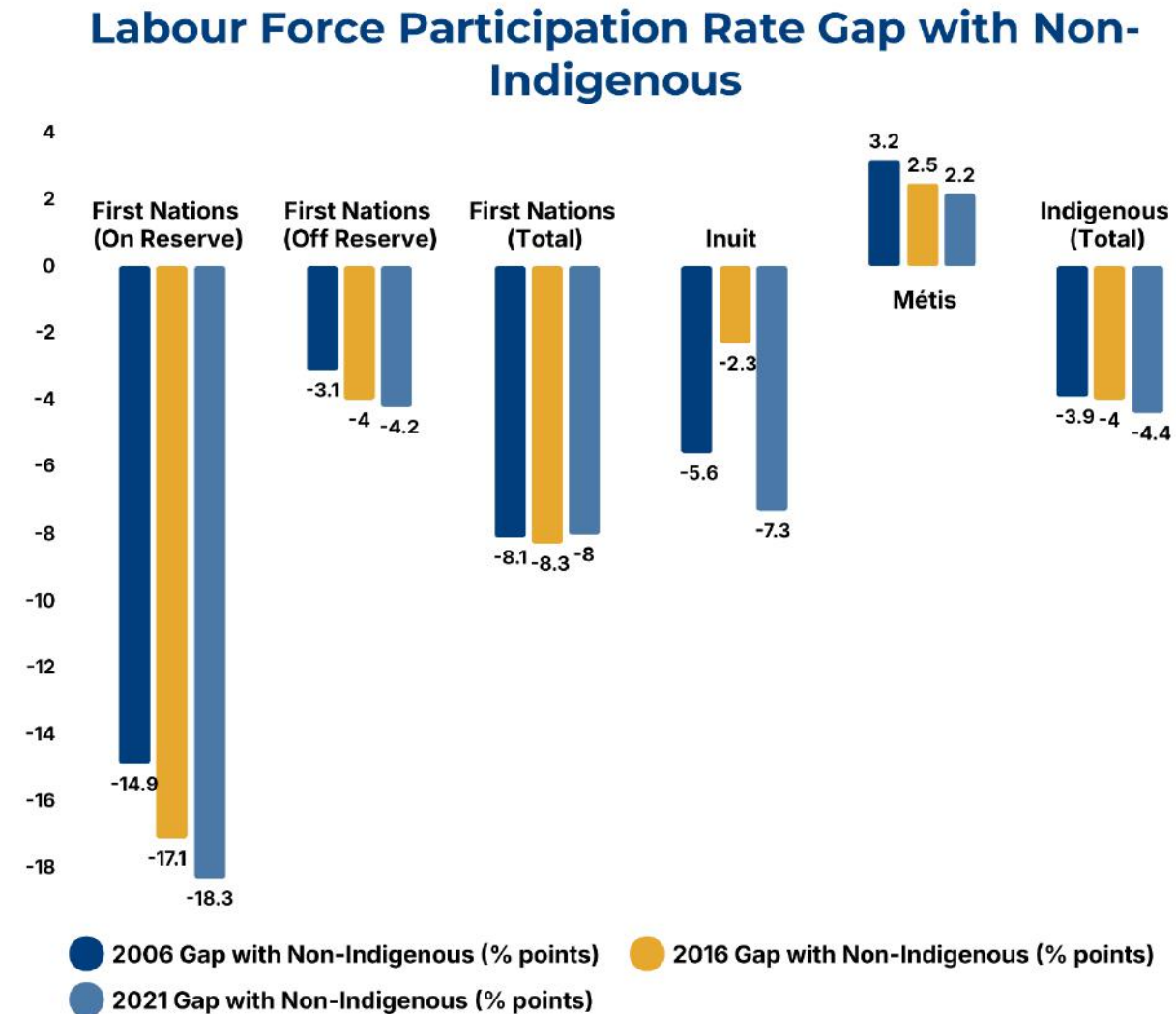
## Labour Force Participation Rate (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and ISC's 2021 Census

The labour force participation rate continues to be lowest for First Nations on reserve, with the 2021 Census demonstrating an increasing gap (from 17.1 percentage points in 2016 to 18.3 percentage points in 2021) with non-Indigenous rates. For Métis, who have historically had higher labour force participation rates than non-Indigenous, the gap reduced in size (from 2.5 percentage points in 2016 to 2.2 percentage points in 2021). Inuit populations, who had in the last census seen an improvement in labour force participation levels, saw these levels drop 6.5 percentage points, increasing the gap with the non-Indigenous population from 2.3 to 7.3 percentage points. Overall, in the 15 years since the 2006 Census, the labour force participation rate gap has increased by 22.82% between First Nations on reserve and non-Indigenous people. Métis populations demonstrate the strongest labour force participation rates, even under pandemic conditions, exceeding non-Indigenous Canadians consistently since 2006 (Figure 5).

Figure 6: Indigenous Labour Force Participation Rate Gap with Non-Indigenous



Source: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and ISC's 2021 Census

Indigenous labour force participation only surpassed its pre-pandemic level fifteen months after the beginning of the pandemic (March-May of 2021), whereas it had returned for non-Indigenous by June-August 2020.<sup>17</sup> This disparity may be in part due to the fact that the Census was taken in May 2021 and at that time, many parts of the country were still in lock-down and Indigenous people were slower to recover in terms of the labour force participation than their non-Indigenous counterparts.

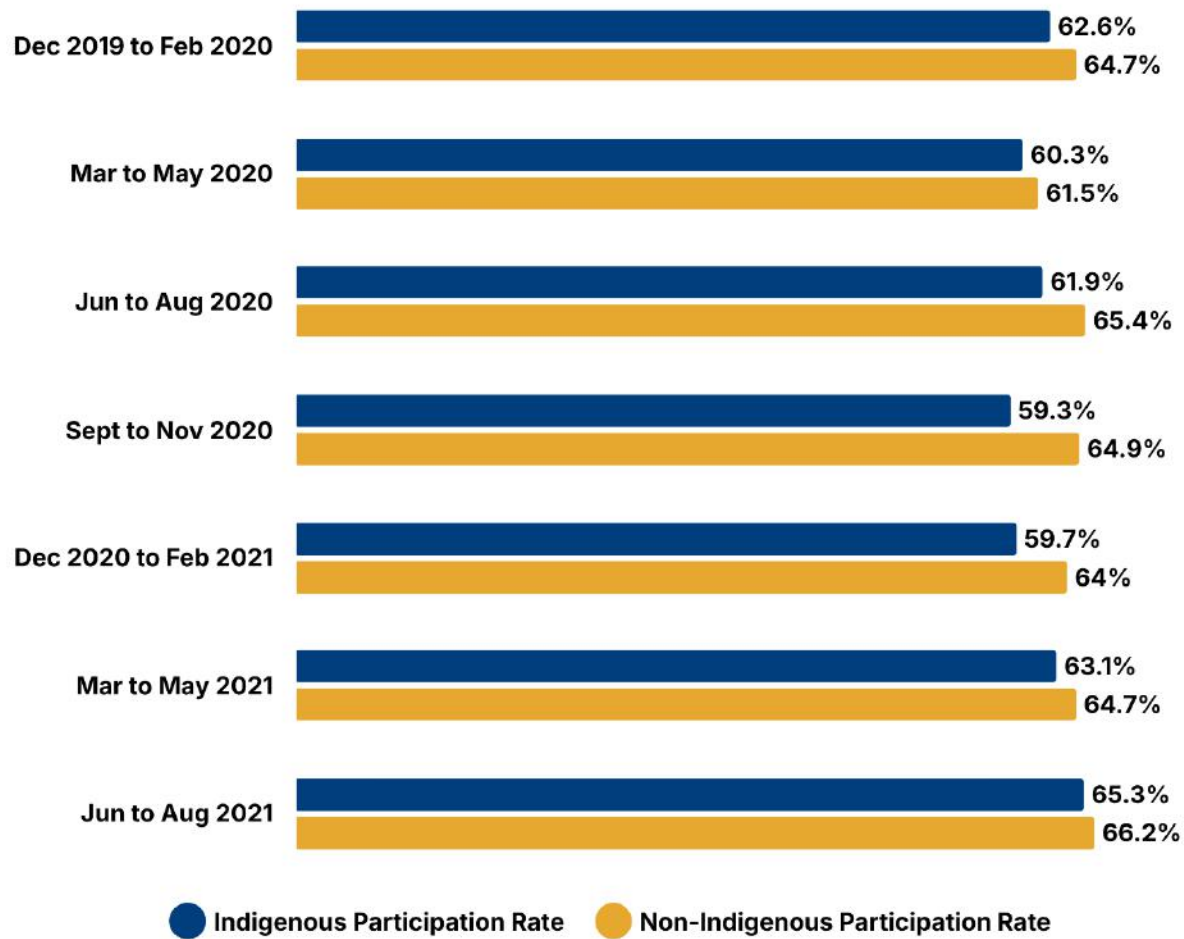
The Labour Force Surveys conducted between December 2019 and August 2021 demonstrate that non-Indigenous people returned to the labour force before their Indigenous counterparts (Figure 7). This slower recovery has been attributed to layoffs due to business closures and because school and childcare options were limited during the height of the pandemic. Another potential explanation for the slower return to the workforce may be attributed to the fact that Indigenous individuals tend to live in multi-

<sup>17</sup> Bleakney, A., Masoud, H., & Robertson, H. (2021, November 16). *Labour market impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous people living off reserve in the provinces: March 2020 to August 2021*. Statistics Canada.

generational households and the fear of spreading the disease to vulnerable family members. This amplified the labour disparities which already existed.<sup>18</sup>

**Figure 7: Labour Force Characteristics by Indigenous Identity, Three-month Averages, December 2019 to August 2021, Population Living Off Reserve in the Provinces, Canada, Not Adjusted for Seasonality**

## Labour Force Participation Rate by Indigenous Identity, Off Reserve, Dec 2019 to Aug 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. *The Labour Force Survey*.

### Gender-Specific Data on Labour Force Participation Rate

The pandemic exacerbated the gendered division of unpaid work, in which women are more likely than men to perform domestic work, including caring for children and other family members. With the closure of schools, childcare facilities, and summer camps, many women were responsible for caring for their children at home, negatively impacting their ability to participate in the paid labour force.<sup>19</sup> However,

<sup>18</sup> Bleakney, A., Masoud H., & Robertson, H. (2021, November 16). *Labour market impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous people living off reserve in the provinces: March 2020 to August 2021*. Statistics Canada.

<sup>19</sup> Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Standing Committee on the Status of Women. (2021). *Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women*. 43<sup>rd</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> session.

there are also numerous benefits of supporting family and caring for children, including fostering a healthy family, which translates to healthy communities and positive socio-economic statistics.

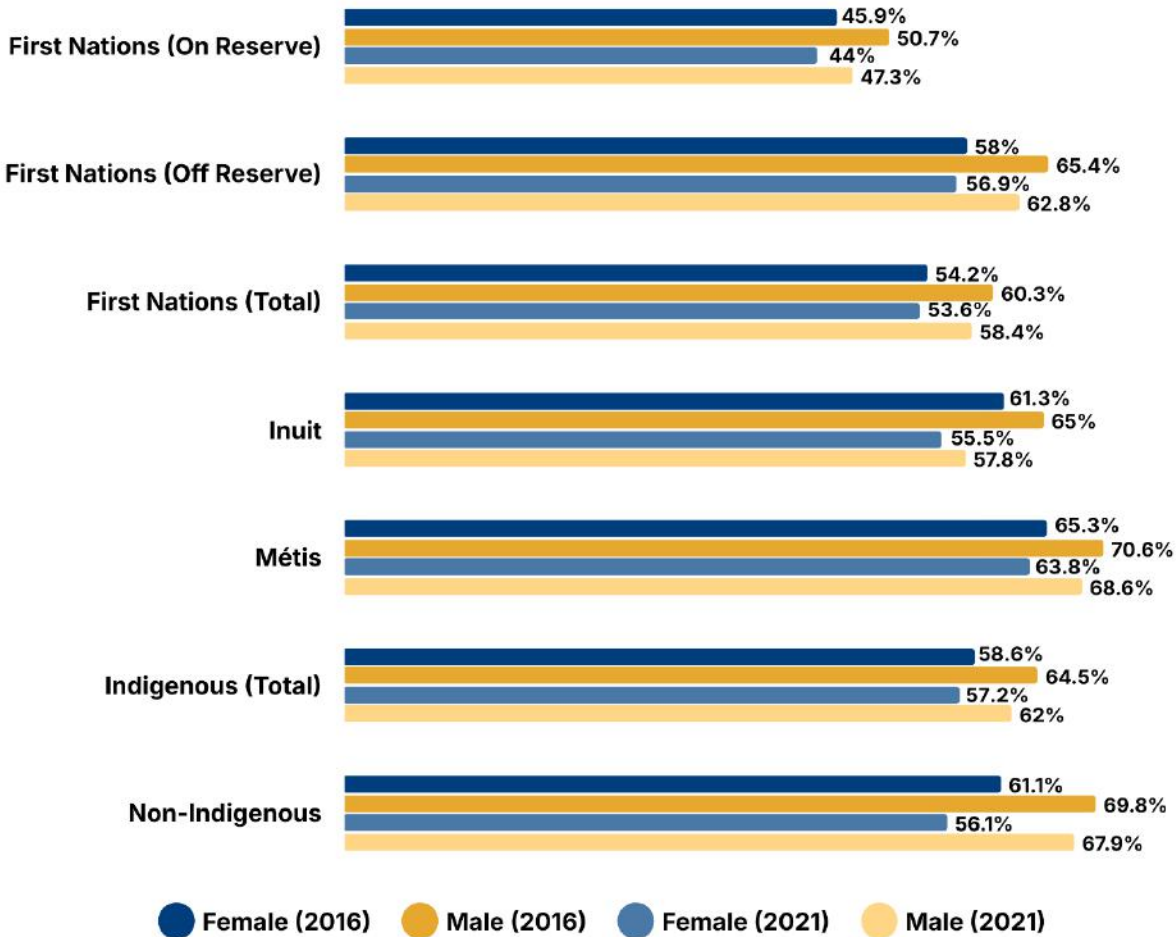
As highlighted in this chapter, between 2016 and 2021, Canadian labour force participation rates fell among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations at a similar rate, signaling a decrease in the number of people who are employed and/or unemployed but searching for work. Since 2016, the gender gap for the Indigenous population narrowed, but widened for the non-Indigenous population. For example, in 2016, Indigenous women's overall participation was 90% that of Indigenous men's, which increased to 92.3% in 2021. This trend was similar across all identity groups, except for the Métis and the non-Indigenous population, for whom the gap widened.

As is the case with employment rates, there is a substantial difference between non-Indigenous men's and women's labour force participation rates, although this gap increased between 2016 and 2021 from 8.7 to 11.8 percentage points. This differed from Indigenous populations, who all saw decreases in that time period. Additionally, the gender gap between Indigenous men's and women's overall labour force participation rates was smaller than that of the non-Indigenous population, decreasing from 5.9 percentage points in 2016 to 4.8 percentage points in 2021.

Analysis also revealed that although overall Indigenous labour force participation rates are lower than those of the non-Indigenous population, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men's and women's participation rates was significantly different. In 2021, Indigenous men's overall participation rate was 91.3% that of non-Indigenous men, compared to 92.4% of that of non-Indigenous men in 2016. For women, Indigenous women's overall participation rate was 101.9% that of non-Indigenous women in 2021, compared to 95.9% in 2016 (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Labour Force Participation Rate (15 years and older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Labour Force Participation Rate (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021



Source: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and ISC's 2021 Census

- Labour force participation rates are higher among men than women, but this gender gap is smaller among Indigenous populations.
- The gender gap in participation rates decreased between 2016 and 2021 for both the Indigenous populations but increased for non-Indigenous populations.
- The gap between the overall participation rates of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is smaller than that between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men.

## Indigenous Unemployment Rate

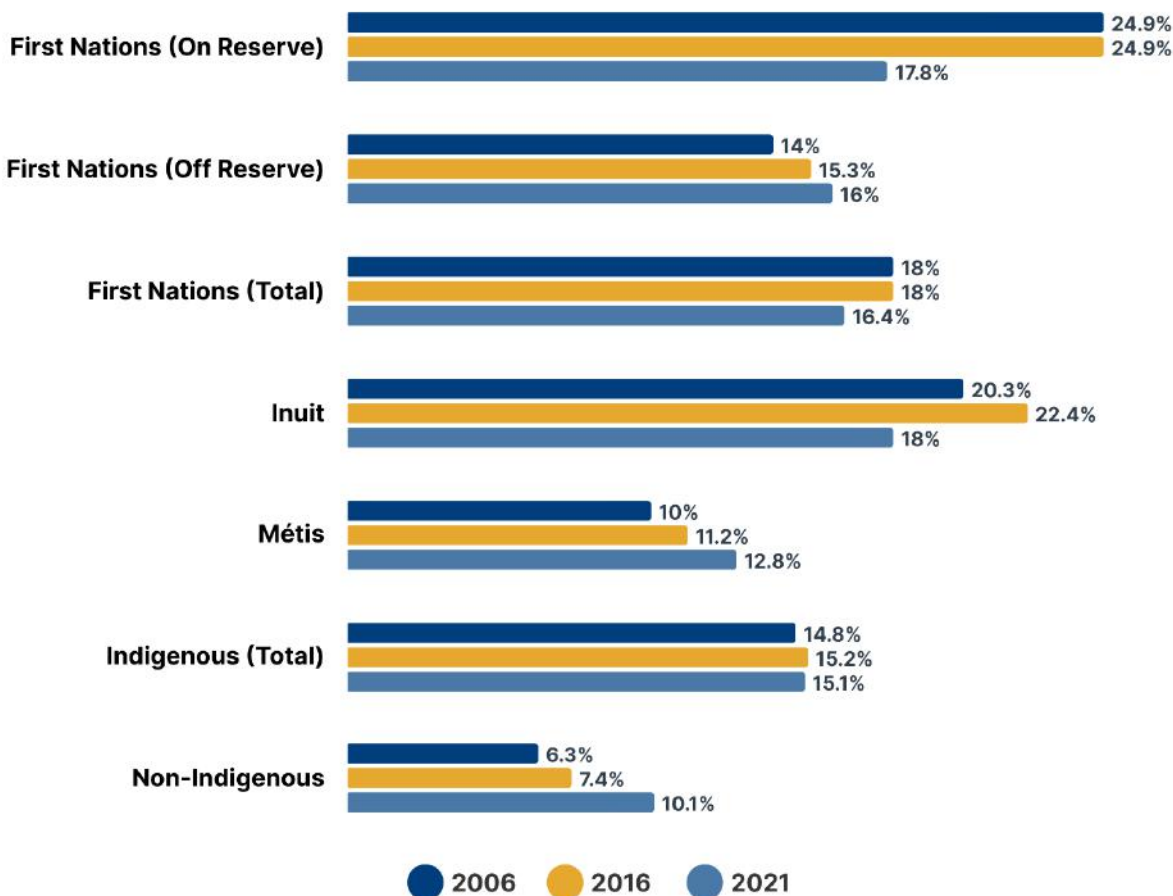
The unemployment rate is the proportion of those in the labour force who are not working. People are considered unemployed if they are available for work and are actively seeking employment but have not found a job. Generally, a lower unemployment rate reflects a stronger economy. The impacts of a higher unemployment rate include decreased living standards and decline in morale as consumers have less

income while costs increase for governments as they pay more in social security benefits.<sup>20</sup> Canadian unemployment rates overall increased between 2006 and 2016 and the trend continues with the 2021 national Census (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Unemployment Rate (15 years and older) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Unemployment Rate (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021

Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05, ISC's 2021 Census



From 2006 to 2016, the unemployment rate remained largely unchanged for First Nations. But in 2021, there was a drastic reduction in the unemployment rate amongst First Nations Communities on reserve by 7 percentage points. For First Nations on reserve, this drop in the unemployment rate corresponds to the rise in the employment rate, but that alone would not explain the shift. Perhaps with the extension of government transfer benefits through the pandemic, changes to the labour market or the labour shortages<sup>21</sup> experienced after the pandemic could be the reason for major change. The gap with the non-Indigenous population also closed because of their unemployment rate rising by over 2.5 percentage

<sup>20</sup> Mateen. (N/A). *Employment and Unemployment*. Simply Economics.

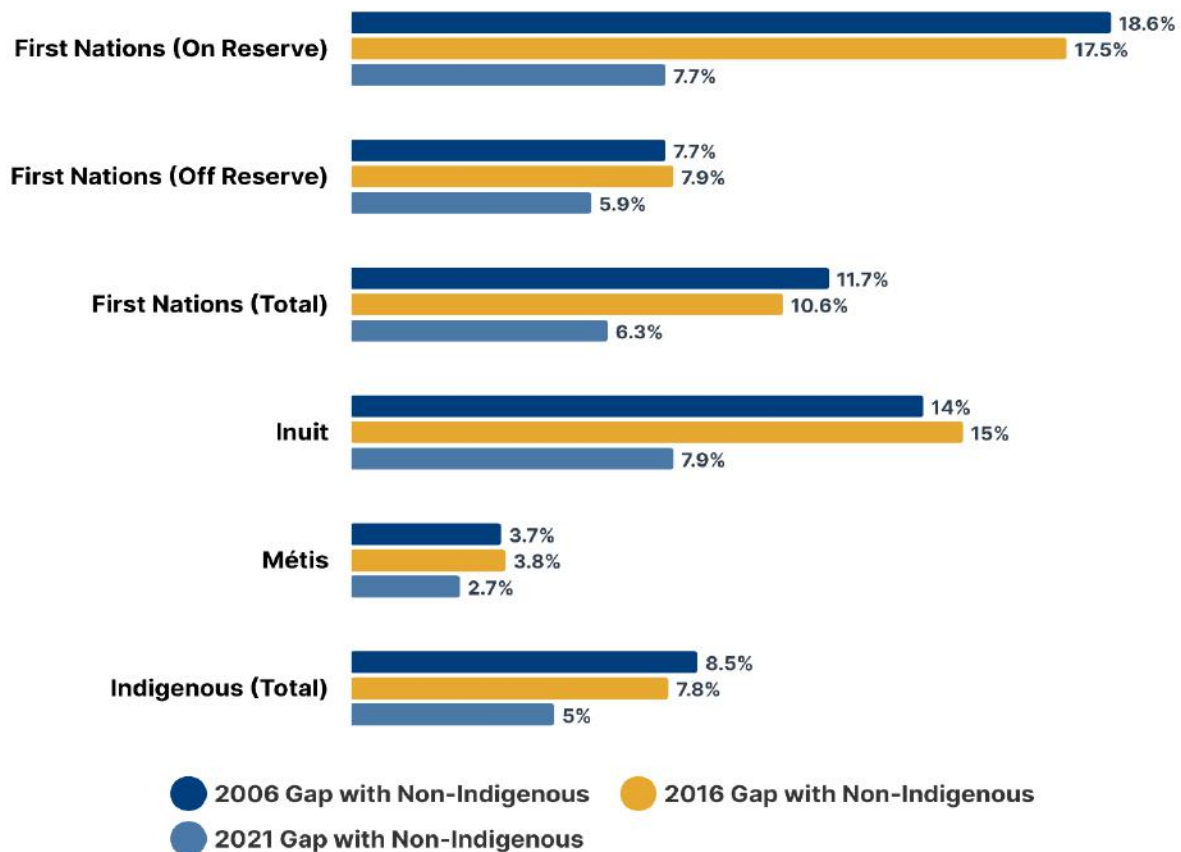
<sup>21</sup> Stephenson, A. (2023, April 3). *Companies challenged by labour shortage seek to recruit, retain Indigenous workers*. The Canadian Press.

points in 2021. This could also be an aberration as there was the lockdown in four provinces in the week that the labour force statistics were sampled.

Despite this apparent improvement for First Nations on reserve, it is important to note that the unemployment rate for Indigenous Peoples was markedly higher than non-Indigenous for all groups, even though the gap closed, and unemployment rates dropped for all identity groups, except Métis. For Métis, the unemployment rate also increased, but for this group it was only just over 1.5 percentage points (Figure 10 & 11).

Figure 10: Percentage Point Unemployment Gap with Non-Indigenous, 2006, 2016, 2021, Canada

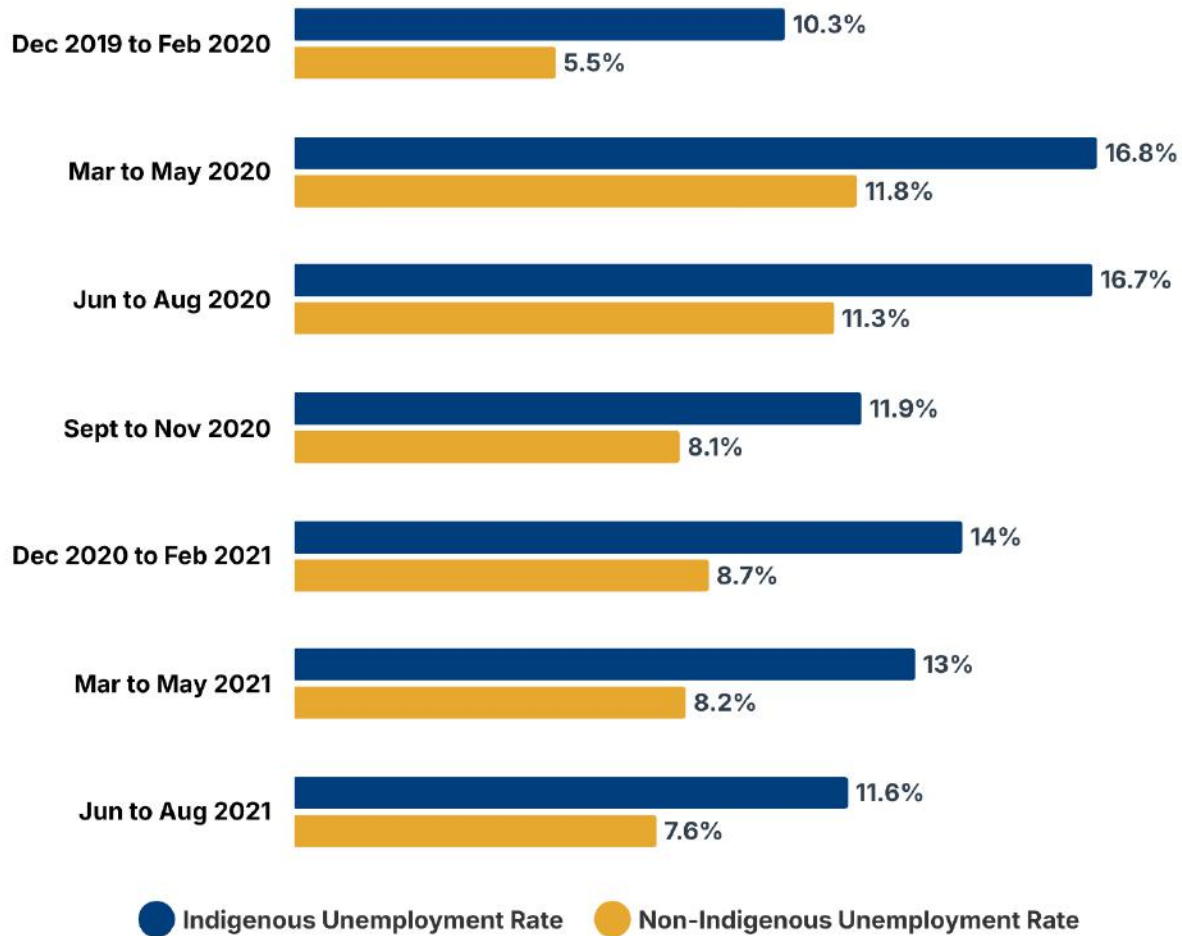
## Unemployment Gap with Non-Indigenous, 2006, 2016 and 2021



Source: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05, ISC's 2021 Census

Figure 11: Unemployment Rate by Indigenous Identity, Three-month Averages, December 2019 to August 2021, Population Living Off Reserve in the Provinces, Canada, Not Adjusted for Seasonality

## Unemployment Rate by Indigenous Identity Dec 2019 to Aug 2021



Source: ISC 2021 Census

### Gender-Specific Data on Unemployment Rate

As this chapter has demonstrated, there has been an increase in unemployment rates among non-Indigenous populations between 2016 and 2021, thereby decreasing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, as the overall rate of the Indigenous population remained consistent. However, a gender-based analysis of the data revealed that overall increases in unemployment rates were largely attributable to non-Indigenous and Indigenous women, whereas Indigenous and non-Indigenous men’s unemployment rates either minimally decreased or increased at a smaller rate than for women. This resulted in a lessening of the gender gap across all categories, with men experiencing higher unemployment levels, except for in the non-Indigenous population. Exceptions to this rule were increases in unemployment rates among First Nation women living off reserve and Métis men and women; however, due to larger increases among women, the gender gap still decreased. First Nation men on

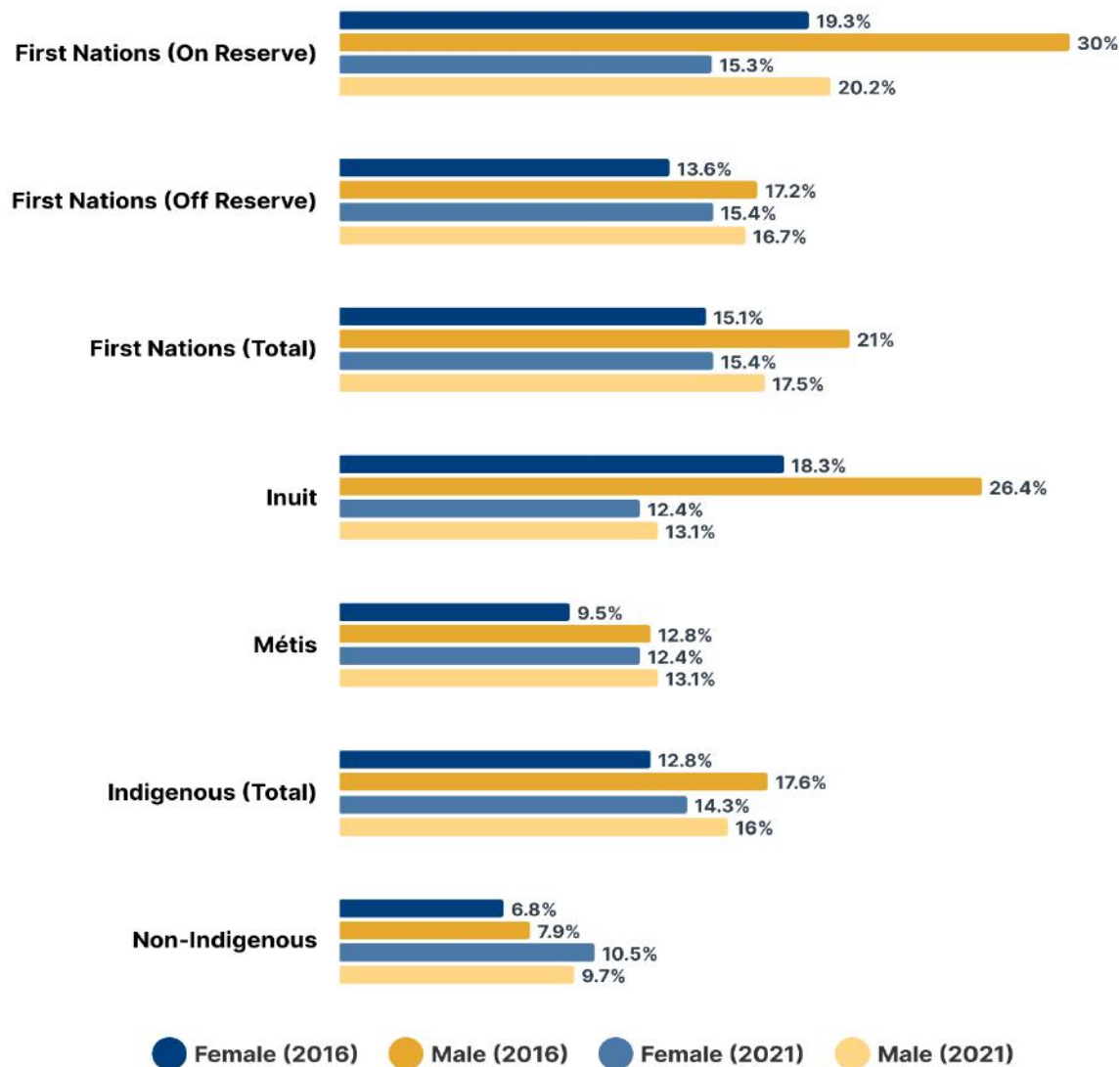


reserve experienced the highest rates of unemployment across all identity groups, at approximately two times higher than those of non-Indigenous men.

The gap in unemployment rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is smaller than that between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men. Specifically, in 2021, the unemployment rate for Indigenous men was 6.3 percentage points higher than for non-Indigenous men but was 3.8 percentage points higher for Indigenous women than non-Indigenous women. This is a considerable decrease since 2016, where the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women were 9.7 percentage points and 6.0 percentage points, respectively. Inuit and Métis women have the lowest unemployment rates among all Indigenous identity groups, both at 12.4%. For Inuit women, this is a 5.9 percentage point decrease since 2016, where Inuit women had the second highest unemployment rates among women. While Métis women remain among those with the lowest unemployment rates, there was an increase of 2.9 percentage points in their rate between 2016 and 2021. First Nation women, both on and off reserve, had the highest unemployment rates of all groups of women, at 15.3% and 15.4%, respectively (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Unemployment Rate (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Unemployment Rate (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021



Source: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05, ISC's 2021 Census

- Unemployment rates are higher for men than women across all identity groups, but lower for men in the non-Indigenous population.
- Increases in unemployment rates between 2016 and 2021 were attributable to increases amongst women, whereas men's unemployment rates either minimally decreased or increased at a smaller rate than for women.
- Other than a slight increase amongst the non-Indigenous population, First Nations off reserve and Métis women were the only group of women to experience increases in unemployment rates.

## Urban Employment

This section compares the employment data across census metropolitan areas (CMAs), population centres (POPCTR), and rural areas.<sup>22</sup> POPCTRs have a population of at least 1,000 with a population density of 400 person or more per square kilometre,<sup>23</sup> whereas, CMAs have a population of at least 100,000, with 50,000 or more living in the core POPCTR.<sup>24</sup>

POPCTRs and CMAs are used to get a picture of the employment situation in urban areas. Urban in this context is considered to be POPCTRs.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, since many studies and reports use CMAs to define an urban area, this report utilizes this definition as well. CMAs are important indicators to capture the picture of the Indigenous population living in the largest cities.

Across all identity groups, the employment rate is highest in CMAs, followed by POPCTRs, then rural areas, in order of highest to lowest. It is interesting to note that both CMAs and POPCTRs are higher than the Canadian average for all identity groups and rural areas are lower than the Canadian average for all identity groups (Figure 13). This is what one might expect as urban areas would have the advantage in supplying more employment opportunities than rural areas.

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<sup>22</sup> Following Statistics Canada definitions, it is important to note that both population centres and rural areas make up all of Canada. Moreover, census metropolitan areas include both population centres and rural areas.

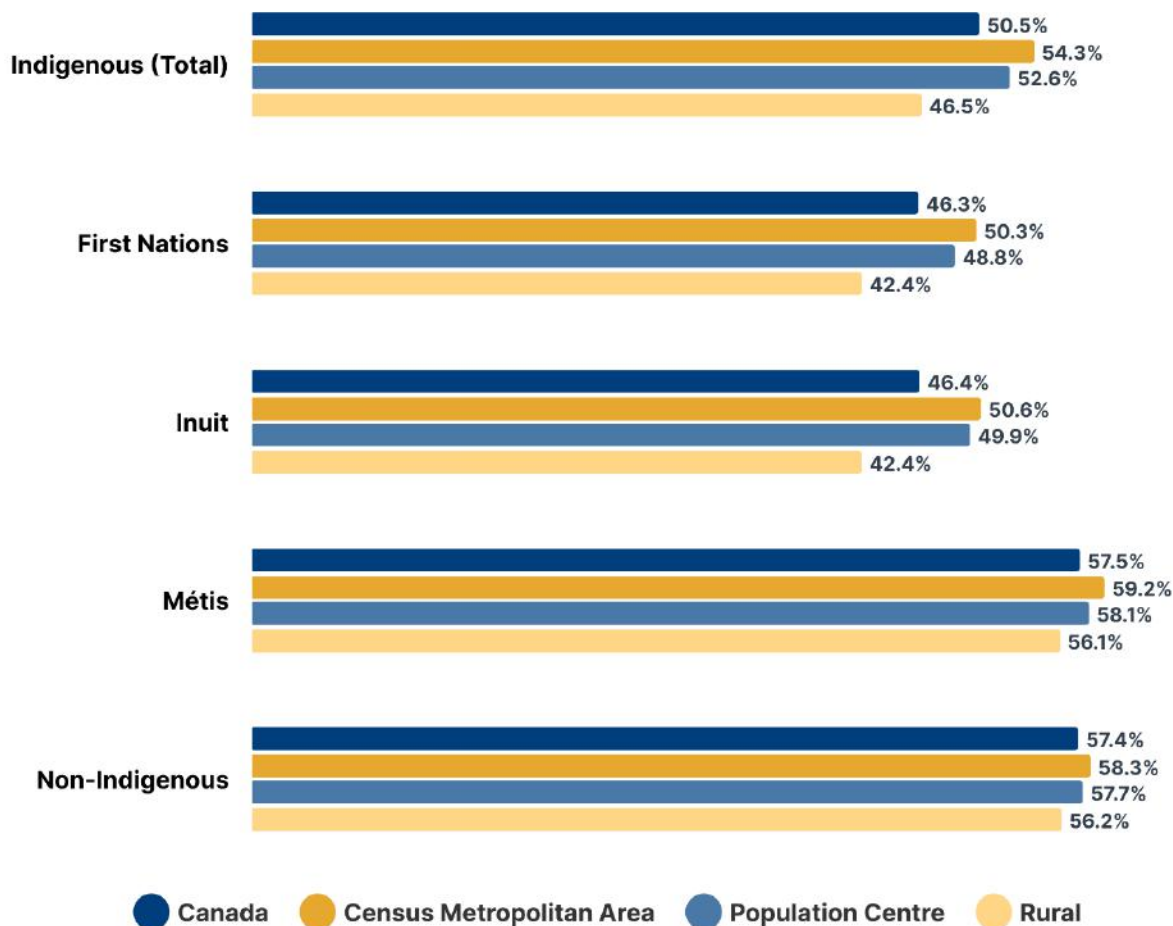
<sup>23</sup> Statistics Canada. (2017, February 8). Population centre (POPCTR).

<sup>24</sup> Statistics Canada. (2021, November 17). *Census metropolitan area (CMA) and census agglomeration (CA)*.

<sup>25</sup> Population centres replaced the term “urban areas” in the 2011 census. The term “urban area” existed from 1961 to 2006 in Canadian censuses.

Figure 13: Employment Rate by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021

## Employment Rate by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021

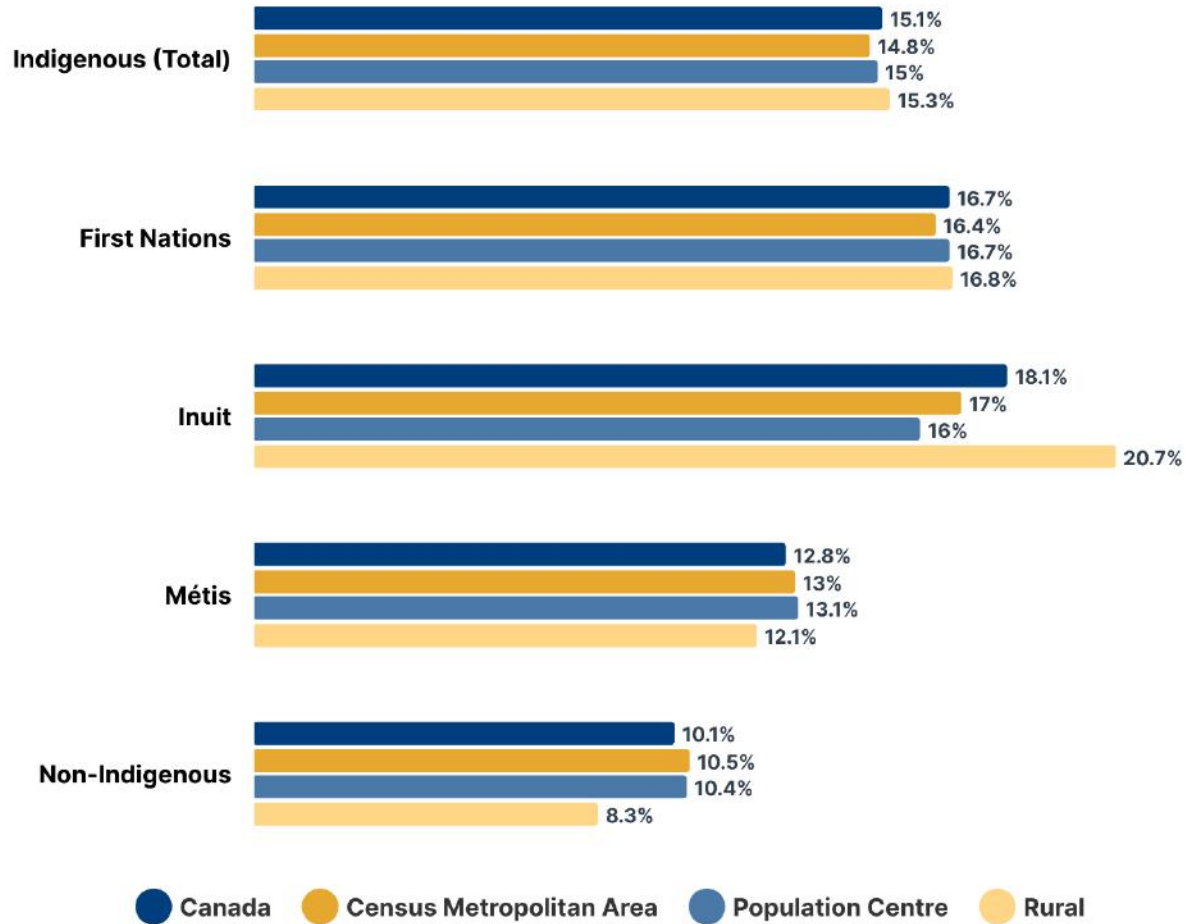


Source: ISC Custom Tabulations, 2021 Census of Population

As for the unemployment rate (Figure 14), the differences are more variable. One would expect the unemployment rate to be lower in urban areas compared to rural areas given the data depicted above. However, this is only true for the Indigenous population (specifically First Nations and Inuit), where rural areas have higher unemployment. The unemployment rate is lower in rural areas for Métis and non-Indigenous peoples compared to urban areas. As mentioned previously, the employment data was collected at a time during lockdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic. This may suggest that rural area employment was more robust and least affected by the pandemic for Métis and non-Indigenous peoples.

Figure 14: Unemployment Rate by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021

## Unemployment Rate by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021

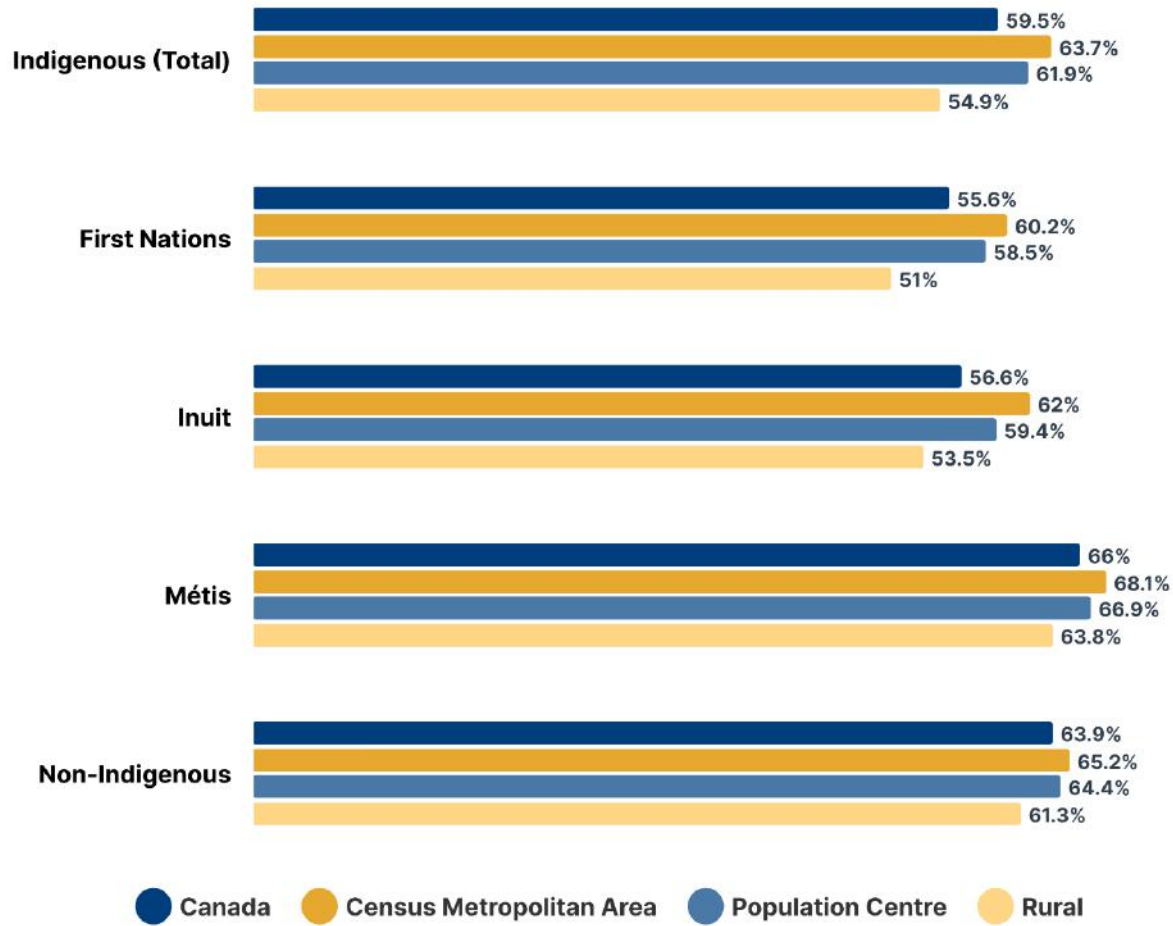


Source: ISC Custom Tabulations, 2021 Census of Population

Labour force participation is more closely aligned with what would be expected. Urban areas had higher participation rates compared to rural areas (Figure 15). For all identity groups, CMAs had the highest labour force participation, followed by POPCTRs and rural areas in order of decreasing participation in the labour force. Additionally, Métis had the highest labour force participation across all geographic areas (Canada, CMAs, POPCTRs, and rural Areas), compared with First Nations who experienced the lowest labour force participation across all geographic areas.

Figure 15: Labour Force Participation Rate by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021

## Labour Force Participation Rate by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations, 2021 Census of Population

In addition, Census data for 2021 shows wide ranging disparities in the gap in employment between urban and rural areas across all identity group (Table 1). Moreover, CMAs show the smallest gaps compared to both POPCTRs and rural areas which suggests Indigenous Peoples at the outskirts of CMAs (rural areas associated with CMAs) are complimentary to improving employment outcomes in large cities, but rural areas outside CMAs greatly contribute to increasing gaps. Furthermore, Métis are shown to have employment outcomes that are better than non-Indigenous peoples when looking at employment and labour force participation rates, except for in rural areas.

For Indigenous Peoples as a whole, the employment rate gap was 4.1 percentage points in CMAs, 5.1 percentage points in POPCTRs, and 9.7 percentage points in rural areas. The unemployment rate gap was 4.3 percentage points in CMAs, 4.6 in POPCTRs, and 7 percentage point in rural areas. The labour force participation gap was 1.5 percentage points in CMAs, 2.5 percentage points in POPCTRs, and 6.4 percentage points in rural areas.

For First Nation Peoples, the employment rate gap was 8 percentage points in CMAs, 8.9 percentage points in POPCTRs, and 13.8 percentage points in rural areas; the unemployment rate gap was 5.9 percentage points in CMAs, 6.3 percentage points in POPCTRs, and 8.5 percentage points in rural areas; and the labour force participation gap was 5 percentage points in CMAs, 5.9 percentage points in POPCTRs, and 10.3 percentage points in rural areas.

For Inuit, the employment rate gap was 7.7 percentage points in CMAs, 7.8 percentage points in POPCTRs, and 13.8 percentage points in rural areas. The unemployment rate gap was 6.5 percentage points in CMAs, 5.6 percentage points in POPCTRs, and 12.4 percentage points in rural areas. The labour force participation gap was 3.2 percentage points in CMAs, 5 percentage points in POPCTRs, and 7.8 percentage points in rural areas.

For Métis, the only gap in employment rate was in rural areas at only 0.1 percentage points. For CMAs and POPCTRs, Métis had a higher employment rate by 0.9 and 0.4 percentage points respectively. The unemployment rate gap was 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8 percentage points in CMAs, POPCTRs, and rural areas, respectively. Moreover, there was no gap in labour force participation as the Métis had a higher labour force participation rate compared to non-Indigenous peoples by 3 percentage points in CMAs, 2.5 percentage points in POPCTRs, and 2.5 percentage points in rural areas.

Finally, the data shows that the gap between First Nations, Inuit, and Métis and non-Indigenous peoples is smallest for labour force participation, but higher for employment and unemployment rates. This suggests that despite closer equality in labour force participation, Indigenous groups still face higher inequality in receiving employment (based on higher gaps in employment and unemployment rates). Moreover, despite Métis having higher labour force participation than non-Indigenous peoples, they still face higher inequality in employment given the unemployment gap between the two groups.

**Table 1: Employment Gaps Compared to Non-Indigenous by Indigenous Identity, Canada, Census Metropolitan Areas, Population Centres, and Rural Areas, 2021 (%)**

IDENTITY	CANADA	CMA	POPULATION CENTRES	RURAL
<b>EMPLOYMENT RATE</b>				
<b>INDIGENOUS</b>	-6.9	-4.1	-5.1	-9.7
<b>FIRST NATIONS</b>	-11.1	-8.0	-8.9	-13.8
<b>INUIT</b>	-11.0	-7.7	-7.8	-13.8
<b>METIS</b>	0.1	0.9	0.4	-0.1
<b>UNEMPLOYMENT RATE</b>				
<b>INDIGENOUS</b>	5.0	4.3	4.6	7.0
<b>FIRST NATIONS</b>	6.6	5.9	6.3	8.5
<b>INUIT</b>	8.0	6.5	5.6	12.4
<b>METIS</b>	2.7	2.6	2.7	3.8
<b>LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE</b>				
<b>INDIGENOUS</b>	-4.4	-1.5	-2.5	-6.4
<b>FIRST NATIONS</b>	-8.3	-5.0	-5.9	-10.3
<b>INUIT</b>	-7.2	-3.2	-5.0	-7.8
<b>METIS</b>	2.1	3.0	2.5	2.5

Source: ISC Custom Tabulations, 2021 Census of Population

## Conclusion

Between 2006 and 2021, Canada experienced decreased employment rates and increased unemployment rates across all identity groups and genders. It is important to recognize the major impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on employment rates and labour force participation rates across the country. While the 2021 Census data is useful to identify and observe trends, future Census surveys will depict a more accurate depiction of employment rates without the impacts of workplace closures, restrictions on travel, “stay at home orders”, etc. The impact of the pandemic on Indigenous groups may point to an increased vulnerability to job market fluctuations that will need to be reviewed and addressed to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Addressing these vulnerabilities will strengthen and prepare Indigenous labour markets for future predicted labour challenges, such as increased automation and the uncoupling of workplace and workforce.

It is important to note that in today’s workforce, there is an increased focus on diversity and inclusion of employees within organizations, making Indigenous employees highly sought after at every level. On-reserve employers are most impacted by competition for employees and absorbing the costs of recruitment and training, for them to later be poached by larger corporations or government entities. In 2021, on-reserve employment figures were on the rise in on-reserve settings, likely due to pandemic effects and the ease of on-reserve restrictions or pandemic-related employment opportunities. Beyond this, jobs on-reserve tend to be less desirable. This may be in part due to poorer employment benefits such as medical benefits, pension services, lack of support funding, etc. The federal government should recognize this trend and compensate Indigenous organizations for providing employment and the necessary training to Indigenous employees before setting them up for careers in larger organizations or government positions.

### Recommendations:

- ***Establish job placement and career advancement services and organizations, specifically for Indigenous job seekers. This includes career counseling, resume building, and interview preparation to help individuals secure well-paying jobs as well as continuous mentorship, training, and professional development opportunities to help maintain and progress in these roles.***
- ***Increase Indigenous employment in federal, provincial, and municipal government roles by setting targets and creating dedicated pathways for Indigenous Peoples to enter and advance in the public service. Report progress on new hires and retention annually.***
- ***Ensure employment opportunities for Indigenous individuals, including those on reserve and in rural and remote areas have competitive salaries, wages, and benefits comparable with employment opportunities offered to non-Indigenous individuals and off-reserve occupations.***
- ***Provide equitable incentives for businesses to hire, train, and retain Indigenous Peoples in the workforce. This could include tax breaks, subsidies, and grants for businesses that employ Indigenous Peoples and invest in their career development.***



- ***Provide funding for Indigenous organizations to be able to effectively anticipate and adapt to future labour market challenges such as advancements in the technological field and environmental issues (e.g., pandemic). This may be through the development of workplans aligned with local economic needs or through training related to emerging technology and other unforeseen events.***
- ***Establish and enhance job creation programs with increased funding for trades, apprenticeships, and certifications that are tailored to Indigenous Peoples and focus on sectors where there is a high demand for workers, skilled labourers and opportunities for sustainable growth (e.g.: green energy, technology, resource development, and healthcare).***
- ***Ensure that human resource policies across all levels of government and organizations respect traditional cultural practices for Indigenous employees to encourage Indigenous employment and retention.***
- ***Promote Indigenous representation on union and corporate boards as well as at local and economic planning committees and institutions.***
- ***Provide additional funding to support Indigenous-owned, and on-reserve businesses that are likely to hire Indigenous employees.***

2019 IEPR Employment recommendation requiring additional attention:

- ***Ensure community workforce plans are informed by local employment needs of businesses so students can target education plans accordingly.***

## CORE INDICATOR #2: INCOME

*“Even today, barriers continue to put a stranglehold on Indigenous peoples’ ability to catch up. We are not part of the economy and cannot feel that we are part of Canada until the gaps are addressed.”*

– NACCA CEO Shannin Metatawabin

### Income Highlights

Income is typically defined as the amount of money earned per person and a country's standard of living is measured by individual income.

#### Average Income Gap

The income gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations has decreased over time. In 2015 the Indigenous average income was \$36,043, \$11,938 less than the non-Indigenous population. In 2020, this gap decreased to \$9,980, with the Indigenous population earning an average income of \$44,920.

 **\$1,958**  
since 2015

#### Median Income Gap

 **\$2,678**  
since 2015

The Indigenous median income in 2015 was \$25,526, \$9,078 below the non-Indigenous population. The Indigenous median income rose to \$34,800 in 2021, \$6,400 below the non-Indigenous population.

#### Income Trends

- Métis continue to earn the highest income in both average and median measures for the Indigenous population at \$49,400 and \$39,600, respectively. First Nations on reserve continue to receive the lowest earnings compared to their off-reserve counterparts and other Indigenous groups with an average income of \$32,960 and a median income of \$26,200.
- Average and median income is highest in urban areas and lowest in rural areas for all identity groups, while the non-Indigenous population earns higher average and median incomes in all geographic areas.
- It is interesting to note that for all groups the Gini coefficient (a statistical measure estimating the relative dispersion of income to represent income inequality) decreased over the last 5 years, indicating a decrease in inequitable distribution of income, most notably for all three Indigenous groups.
- Furthermore, based on the Market Basket Measure of poverty status, the Indigenous population have a poverty rate 3.9 percent higher than the non-Indigenous population. The poverty rate was highest for First Nations at 14.1 percent, the lowest for Métis at 9.2 percent, and 10.2 percent for Inuit.

#### Gender-Specific Data

- Generally, median incomes are higher among men than women, although, this gap is smaller among the Indigenous population than it is among the non-Indigenous population at a difference of \$2,000 and \$9,600, respectively. This trend was also observed with the 2015 data. Further, in 2021, the income gap between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous women is smaller than the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men at \$3,200 and \$10,800, respectively.
- In general, men earn more than women in the same occupation and industry for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals.

#### Government Transfers

- Government transfers increased for all Indigenous identity groups from 17 percent in 2015 to 26 percent in 2020, mostly in part due to the income programs intended to provide financial supports for individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020 non-Indigenous population's percent income received from government transfers is 8 percentage points below the Indigenous population. This increase in proportion of income received through government transfers contributes to the increased income levels.
- Métis experience the lowest dependency on government transfers compared to all Indigenous groups at 21 percent, 3 percentage points above the non-Indigenous population. First Nations continue to experience the greatest dependency on government transfers at 29 percent, 11 percent above the non-Indigenous population. This dependency is increased on reserve where the percent gap is 24. For First Nations off reserve and the Inuit population, the percent gap with the non-Indigenous population is 8.

## Introduction

Income is typically defined as the amount of money earned per person. Generally, one factor used to measure a country's standard of living is individual income, with the higher personal income contributing

to higher living standards. This is made possible because higher income typically makes it possible for individuals to purchase a range of goods and services in higher quantities and quality. It is important to note that income and wealth also contribute positively to an individual’s feelings of well-being and development. This chapter measures Indigenous income in Canada using various income measures across all identity groups (Indigenous, non-Indigenous, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis). Specifically, the income measures that will be reviewed are: average income, median income, and proportion of income from government transfers. The composition of income in various industries, occupations, and education level will also be reviewed. Furthermore, income inequality is measured using the Gini coefficient and various low-income measures. Finally, new to this report will be a comparison of urban and rural incomes using the various income measures identified above.

### Average Income and Median Income

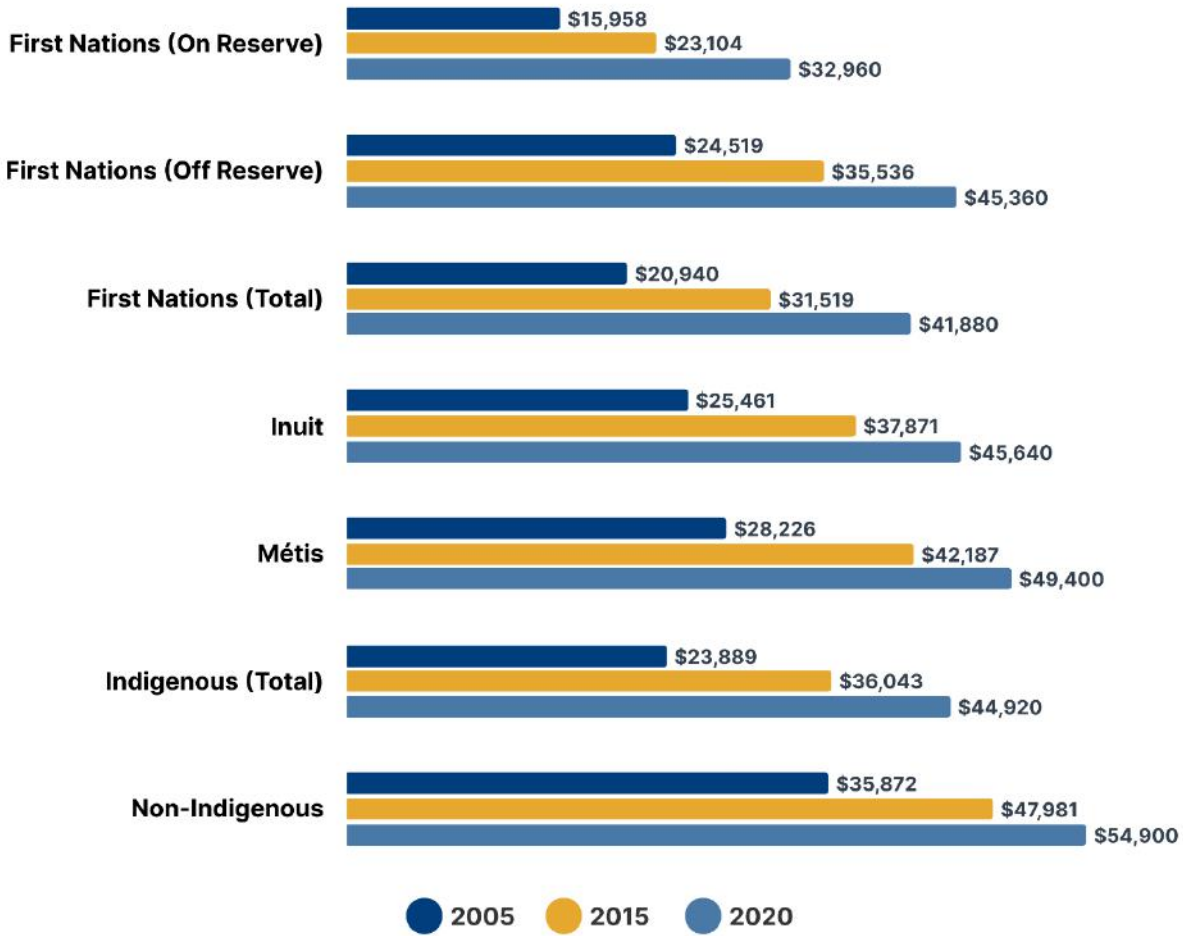
From Figure 16, the average income for the entirety of the Indigenous population (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) was \$44,920 in the 2021 Canadian Census, an increase from \$36,043 in the 2016 Census (24.6% change). This lowered the gap with the non-Indigenous population from \$11,938 to \$9,980. The Métis population continue to earn the highest of Indigenous groups, with an average income of \$49,400 in comparison to First Nations on reserve, who continue to earn the lowest income, at an average of \$32,960. Despite this, on-reserve First Nation people’s earnings (average income) are increasing at 42.2% from the 2016 Census, which is the largest percentage change. In contrast, the Métis population showed the lowest percentage growth, at 17.1 %. As for Inuit, average income earned was \$45,640, which was the second highest among the three main Indigenous groups. For more detailed breakdown of income data, please refer to **Annex E**.

**Table 2: Earning Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, 2021**

Income Highlights: Earnings Gap			
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Gap
Average Income <i>Source: 2021 Census of Population</i>	\$44,920	\$54,900	-9,980
Median Income	\$34,800	\$41,200	-6,400

Figure 16: Average Income (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2005, 2015 and 2020, Canada

## Average Income (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2005, 2015 and 2020



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population<sup>26</sup>

First Nations on reserve continue to earn the least amount of average income in comparison to other Indigenous groups and to non-Indigenous individuals. This may be due to the nature of the employment opportunities available on reserve versus off. The types of employment available may not be as competitive in terms of salary or benefits as those located off reserve.

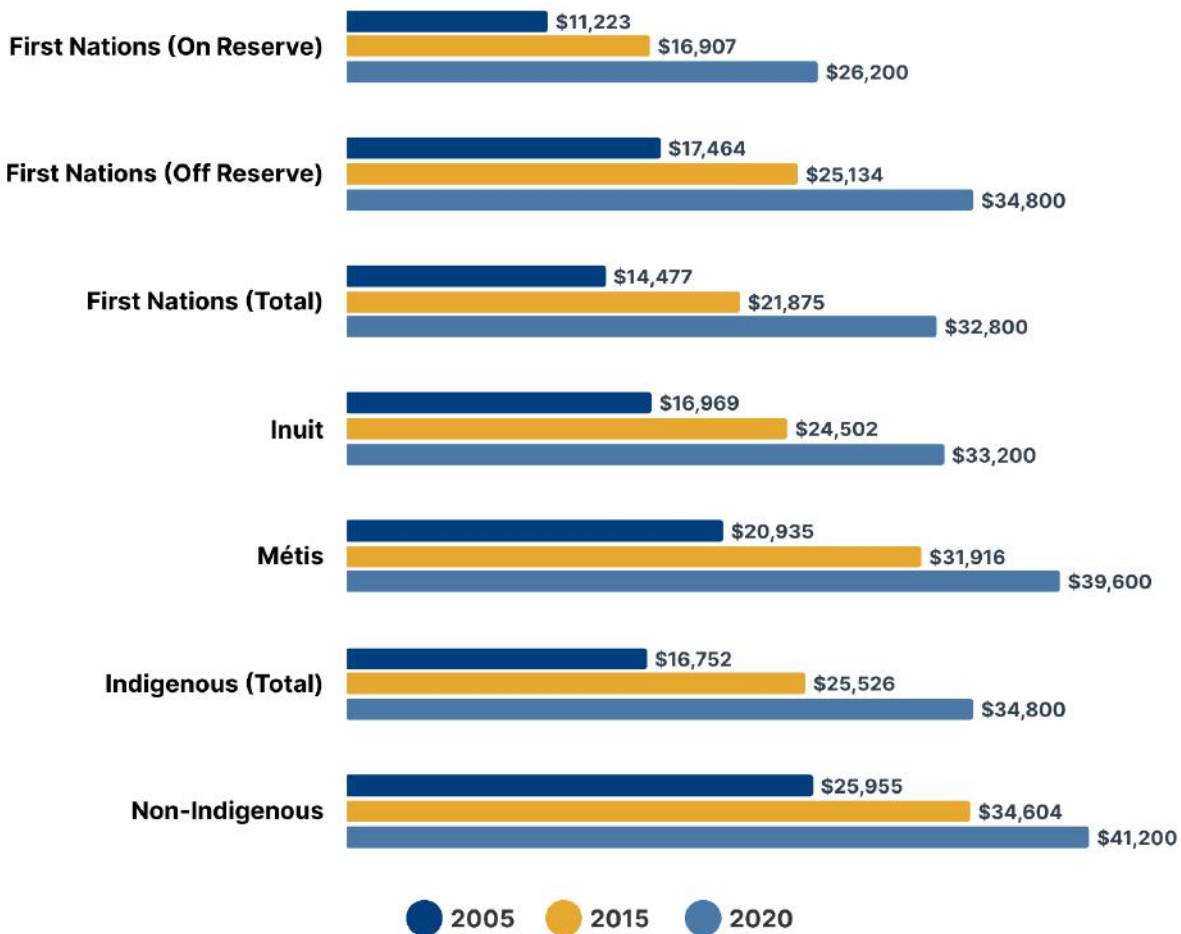
The median income for the entirety of the Indigenous population increased by 36.3%, a higher percentage than average income, with median earnings of \$34,800 in the 2021 Canadian Census compared to \$25,526 in the 2016 Census. The Métis population continue to have the highest median income of all Indigenous groups, at \$39,600, compared with First Nations on reserve, who earned the lowest median income at \$26,200. As with average income, First Nations on reserve median income is increasing at the fastest rate

<sup>26</sup> 2005 and 2015 taken from 2019 IEPR, ANNEX A: TABLES, CORE INDICATOR #2: INCOME. Source: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 10 and 2016 Census Core Table 5.04

(55.0% change). Similarly, the Métis population is increasing at the slowest rate, having the lowest percentage change (24.1 %). As for Inuit, they earned \$33,200 in median income, which was the second highest amount compared to all three Indigenous groups (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Median Income (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2005, 2015, and 2020, Canada

## Median Income (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2005, 2015 and 2020



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> 2005 and 2015 taken from 2019 IEPR, ANNEX A: TABLES, CORE INDICATOR #2: INCOME. Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 10 and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 5.04

- The income gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations has decreased because of larger increases in income by the Indigenous population. Much of this increase was due to larger increases in proportion of income received through government transfers to the Indigenous population.
- Métis continue to earn the highest income in both average and median measures.
- First Nations on reserve continue to receive the lowest earnings compared to their off-reserve counterparts and other Indigenous groups.

Comparisons across Indigenous identity groups and the non-Indigenous population show that the Indigenous population has experienced a larger percentage change in both average income and median (Table 1 and 2 in annex). This has resulted in a narrowing of the Indigenous to non-Indigenous earnings gaps in both average and median income. Specifically, the average income gap was -\$9,980 in 2020, an improvement from -\$11,938 in 2015. Moreover, the median income gap was -\$6,400 in 2020, an improvement from -\$9,078 in 2015 (Table 2). However, much of this decrease is attributed to a higher proportion of income received through government transfers by the Indigenous population than the non-Indigenous population (Figure 19).

#### Gender-Specific Data on Median Employment Income

The gap between the median incomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is smaller than that between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men. In 2021, the median income of women within the overall Indigenous population was 91.4% that of non-Indigenous women, whereas that of men within the overall Indigenous population was 76.9% that of non-Indigenous men. These numbers indicate that there is greater income parity among women than men, as was the case in 2015. Between 2015 and 2021, while there was an increase in the gap between the median employment income of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women, the gap decreased more among women than men (Figure 18).

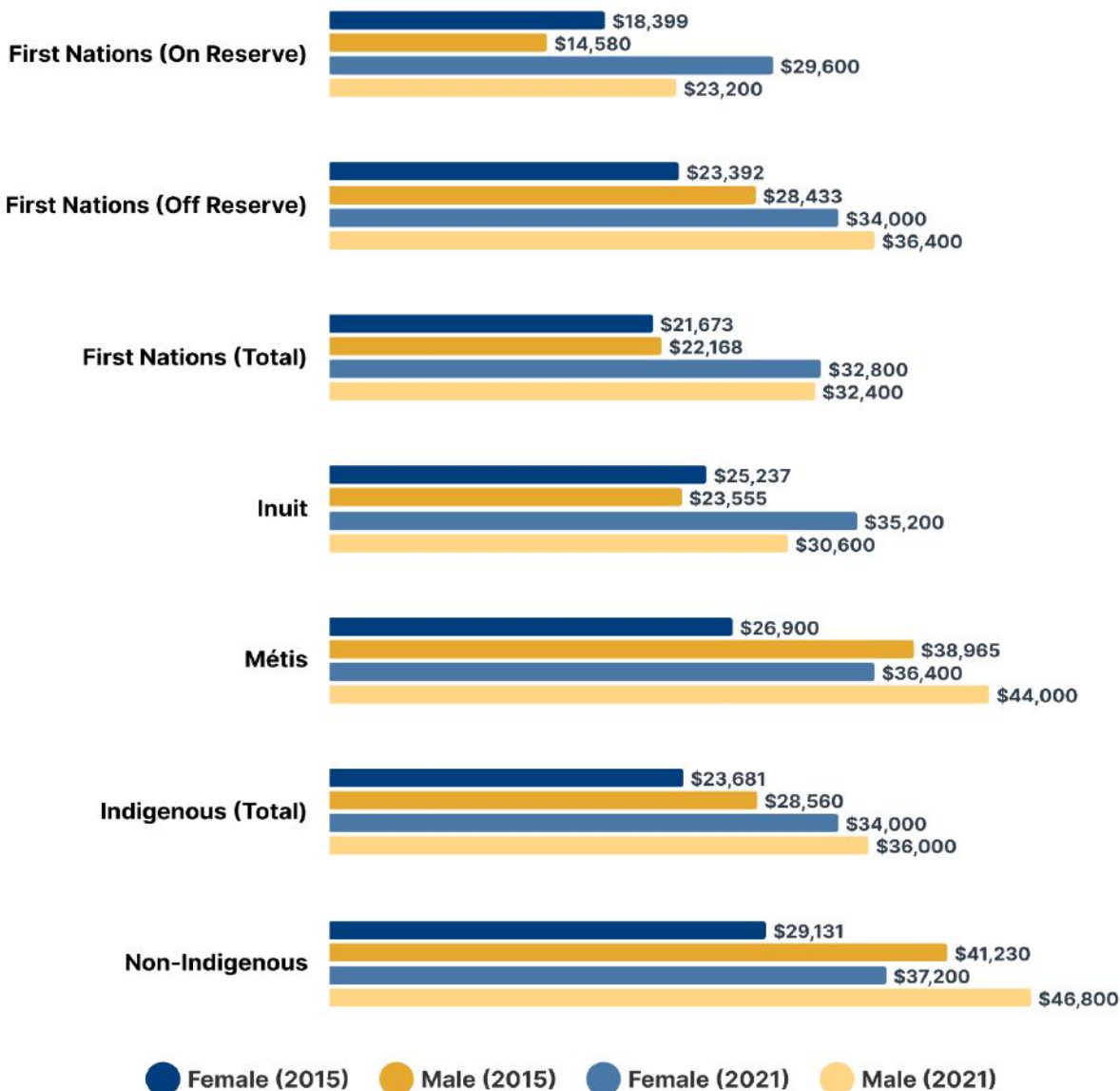
A gender-based analysis of median income data supports the aforementioned observation that the gap between the incomes of Indigenous men and women was smaller than that of non-Indigenous men and women. The overall median income of Indigenous women in 2021 was \$34,000, or 94.4% of that of Indigenous men (\$36,000). This is an improvement from the 2016 findings, where median income for Indigenous women was \$23,681 and 82.9% that of Indigenous men (\$28,560). The median incomes of First Nation women on reserve and Inuit women were higher than those of their male counterparts as was the case in 2015. In 2021, the median income of First Nation men on reserve was 78.4% that of First Nation women on reserve, and the median income of Inuit men was 86.9% that of Inuit women. Compared with the findings in 2015 (79.2% and 93.3%, respectively), this indicates a slight increase in the gender gap between First Nation men and women on reserve and Inuit men and women. Comparatively, within the non-Indigenous population, the median income of women was \$37,200, or 79.5% that of men (\$46,800), closing the gap by 9.0 percentage points since 2015. This suggests that the non-Indigenous population is following the Indigenous population in closing gender-based income gaps.

In 2021, the median income of First Nation men on reserve was \$23,200, 49.6% that of non-Indigenous men (\$46,800). This indicates a significant narrowing of the gap since 2015, from 35.4% in 2015 to 49.6% in 2021. Similarly, the gap between men within the overall Indigenous population and non-Indigenous men narrowed by 7.7 percentage points between 2015 and 2021. While the gaps between the median incomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women are less than those of men, they are nonetheless

existent. In 2021, the smallest gap existed between Métis and non-Indigenous women, as Métis women's median income was 97.8% (\$36,400) of that of non-Indigenous women (\$37,200), whereas the largest gap existed between First Nation women on reserve and non-Indigenous women, as First Nation on-reserve women's income was 79.6% (\$29,600) of that of non-Indigenous women (\$37,200).

Figure 18: Median Income (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2015 and 2021, Canada

## Median Income (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2015 and 2021



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> 2005 and 2015 taken from 2019 IEPR, ANNEX A: TABLES, CORE INDICATOR #2: INCOME. Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 10 and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 5.04

- Generally, median incomes are higher among men than women, although this gap is smaller among the Indigenous population than it is among the non-Indigenous population.
- The income gap is smaller between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women than it is between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men.
- Between 2015 and 2021, the gap between the median incomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women decreased more than the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men.
- The median income of First Nations on reserve and Inuit women is higher than that of their male counterparts.

## Government Transfers

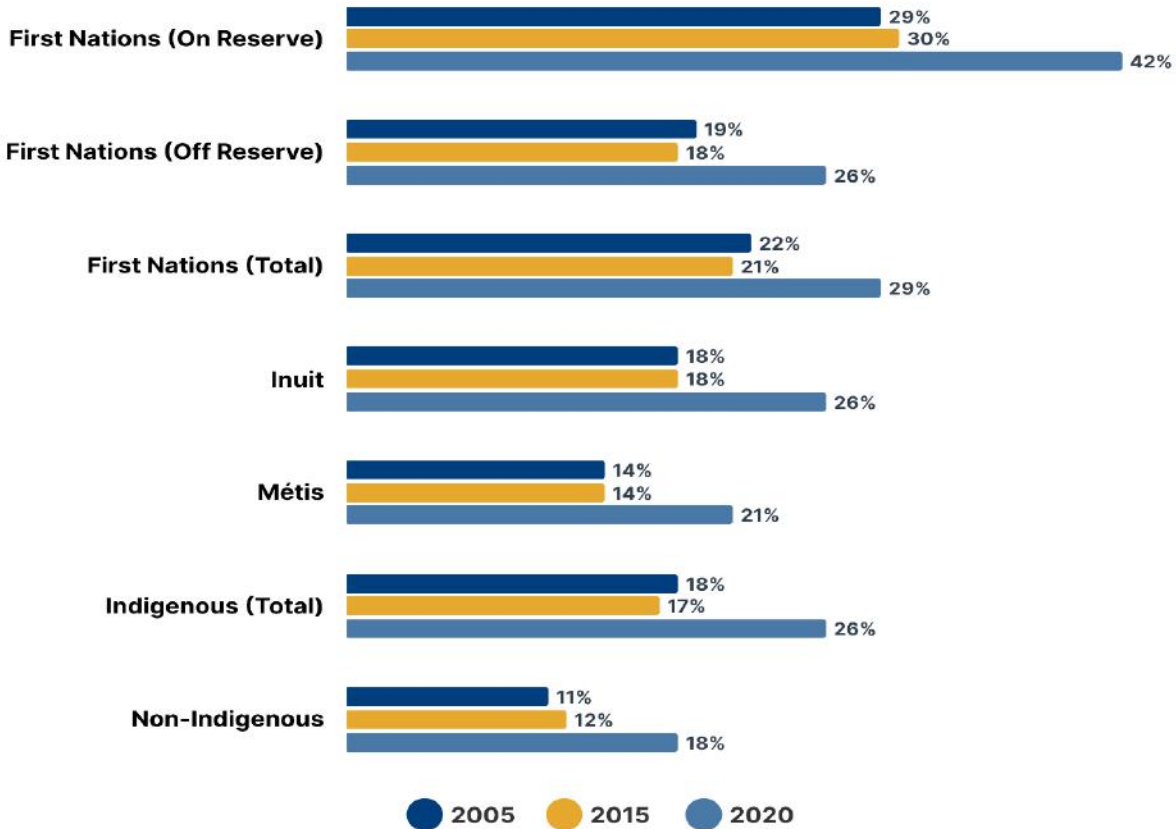
The percentage of income received from government transfers during the 2021 census increased across all identity groups (Figure 19). Amongst the Indigenous groups, First Nations on reserve continue to experience the greatest dependency on transfers with 42%, while Métis continue to experience the lowest dependency, receiving the lowest percentage (21%). The non-Indigenous population, as expected, still receives the lowest percentage of income derived from government transfers (18%).

Much of the increase in government transfers across the groups can be attributed to personal relief measures enacted during the Covid-19 pandemic. The 2021 Census was administered during the height of the pandemic and distinctly specified Covid-19 personal relief measures in the calculation of government transfers.



Figure 19: Percent of Income Received from Government Transfers (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2005, 2015 and 2020, Canada

## Percent of Income Received from Government Transfers (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2005, 2015 and 2020



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population<sup>29</sup>

- Government transfers increased for all identity groups, mostly in part due to the income programs intended to provide financial supports for individuals affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Métis experience the lowest dependency on government transfers, receiving the lowest as a percentage of income compared to all Indigenous groups.
- First Nations continue to experience the greatest dependency on government transfers, especially on reserve.

### Gender-Specific Data on Proportion of Income Received Through Government Transfers

This chapter and its findings have thus far highlighted greater employment and income parity between Indigenous women and men than between non-Indigenous women and men, in addition to greater

<sup>29</sup> 2005 and 2015 taken from 2019 IEPR, ANNEX A: TABLES, CORE INDICATOR #2: INCOME. Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 14 and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 5.04

employment and income parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women than between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men. However, data on the proportion of income received through government transfers reveals that the opposite is true for both findings. These trends are consistent with the 2016 census data and the findings of the 2019 Report.

In 2021, the proportion of income received from government transfers was higher for women – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – than for men. This gender gap was higher in the overall Indigenous population than in the non-Indigenous population. In 2021, 23.0% of non-Indigenous women’s income was received through government transfers, compared with 14.0% of non-Indigenous men, a gap of 9 percentage points. In comparison, a 12-percentage point gap existed in the Indigenous population, as 32.0% of Indigenous women’s income was received through government transfers, compared with 20.0% among Indigenous men. This is consistent with the 2005 and 2015 findings and is unsurprising, as single-parent homes are more likely to require child benefit transfers. Indigenous households are more likely to be headed by a single parent than non-Indigenous households, and Indigenous women are nearly five times more likely to be that single parent.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous women reported a slightly higher rate of job loss or reduced work hours than men<sup>31</sup>, indicating that they may have accessed government transfers to supplement their income.

Consistent with the 2015 findings, the proportion of income received from government transfers is higher for Indigenous than non-Indigenous women. In 2021, 23.0% of non-Indigenous women’s income was received through government transfers, compared with 32.0% of women in the overall Indigenous population, a gap of 9 percentage points. Both non-Indigenous and Indigenous women experienced increases in the proportion of income received from government transfers between 2015 and 2021, at 7 and 8.3 percentage points, respectively. The gap between the proportion of income received through government transfers for Indigenous and non-Indigenous men was 6 percentage points. Like women, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous men’s proportions of income from government transfers increased between 2015 and 2021, by 5.7 and 8 percentage points, respectively.

Between 2015 and 2021, all identity groups experienced increases in the proportion of income received through government transfers, largely because of the COVID-19 pandemic. First Nation men on reserve experienced the largest increase, from 21.8% in 2015 to 36.0% in 2021, an increase of 14.2 percentage points. Among the Indigenous population, Métis men experienced the smallest increase, from 10.1% in 2015 to 16.0% in 2021, an increase of 5.9 percentage points. However, the smallest increases among women and men were observed in the non-Indigenous population, at 7 percentage points for women and 5.7 percentage points for men (Figure 20).

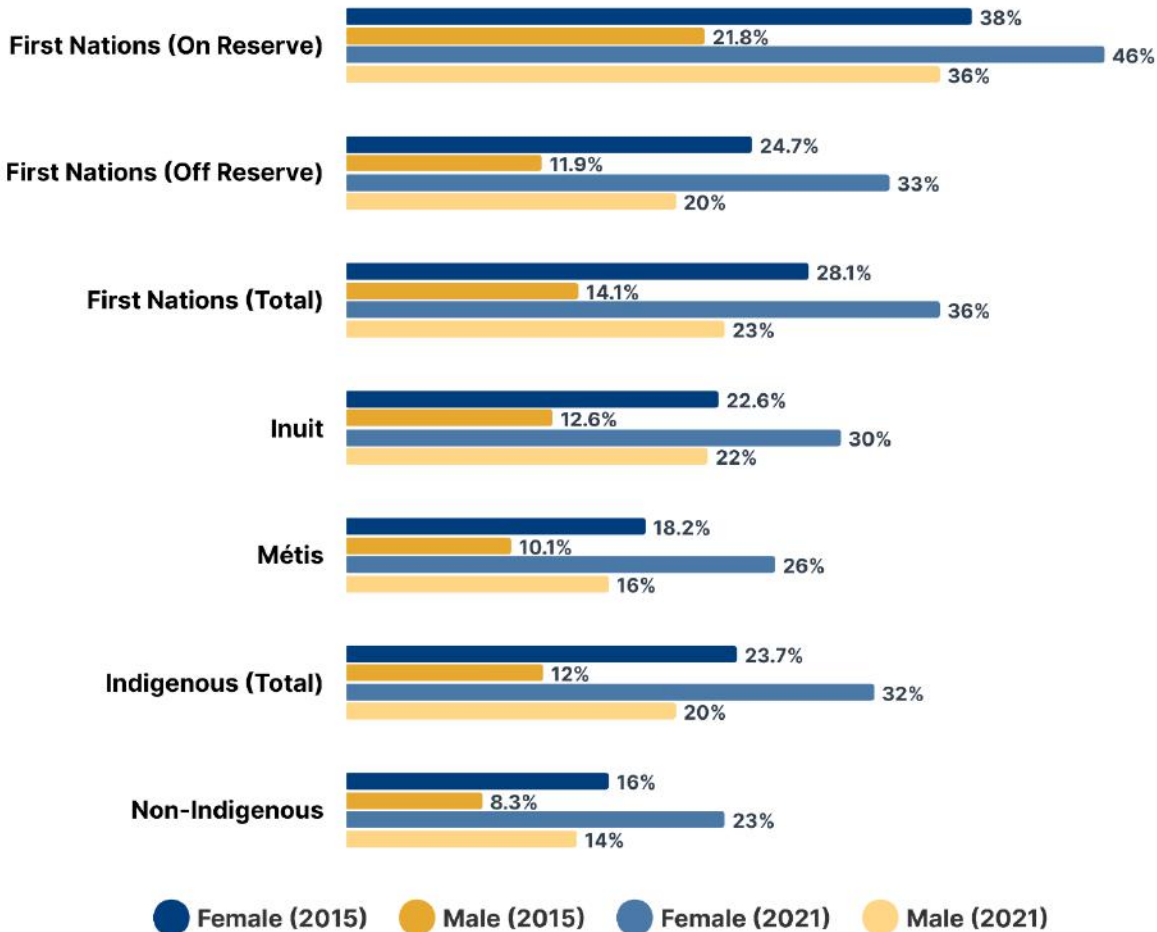
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<sup>30</sup> Halseth, R. (2013). *Aboriginal Women in Canada: Gender, Socio-Economic Determinants of Health, and Initiatives to Close the Wellness Gap*. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health.

<sup>31</sup> Arriagada, P., Frank, K., Hahmann, T., & Hou, F. (2020, July 14). *Economic impact of COVID-19 among Indigenous people*. Statistics Canada.

Figure 20: Percent of Income Received from Government Transfers (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group and Gender, 2015 and 2021, Canada.

## Percent of Income Received from Government Transfers (15 Years and Older) by Identity Group, 2005, 2015 and 2020



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population<sup>32</sup>

- The proportion of income received through government transfers is higher for women than men, and this gender gap is larger for the overall Indigenous population than for the non-Indigenous population.
- The gap between the proportion of income for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is larger than that between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men.
- All identity groups experienced an increase in the proportion of income received from government transfers, with First Nation men on reserve experiencing the largest increase.

<sup>32</sup> 2005 and 2015 taken from 2019 IEPR, ANNEX A: TABLES, CORE INDICATOR #2: INCOME. Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 14 and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 5.04

## Urban Income

According to the 2021 Census, 801,045 Indigenous people were living in urban areas in Canada, which has grown by 12.5% since 2016.<sup>33</sup> Given that around 44.5% of Indigenous Peoples live in urban centres, this section analyzes urban income levels in comparison to rural areas and the rest of Canada. To capture income levels in urban environments, both POPCTRs and CMAs are considered.

Figure 21 displays the average income in 2021 by identity group in urban and rural areas in comparison to the rest of Canada. For average income, Indigenous Peoples in CMAs, POPCTRs, and rural areas earned \$48,502, \$47,040 and \$41,040; First Nations earned \$46,416, \$44,640 and \$37,560; Inuit earned \$45,068, \$48,920 and \$41,960; Métis earned \$51,054, \$49,960 and \$47,920; and non-Indigenous peoples earned \$56,580, \$55,350, and \$52,650 respectively.

Several trends are observed:

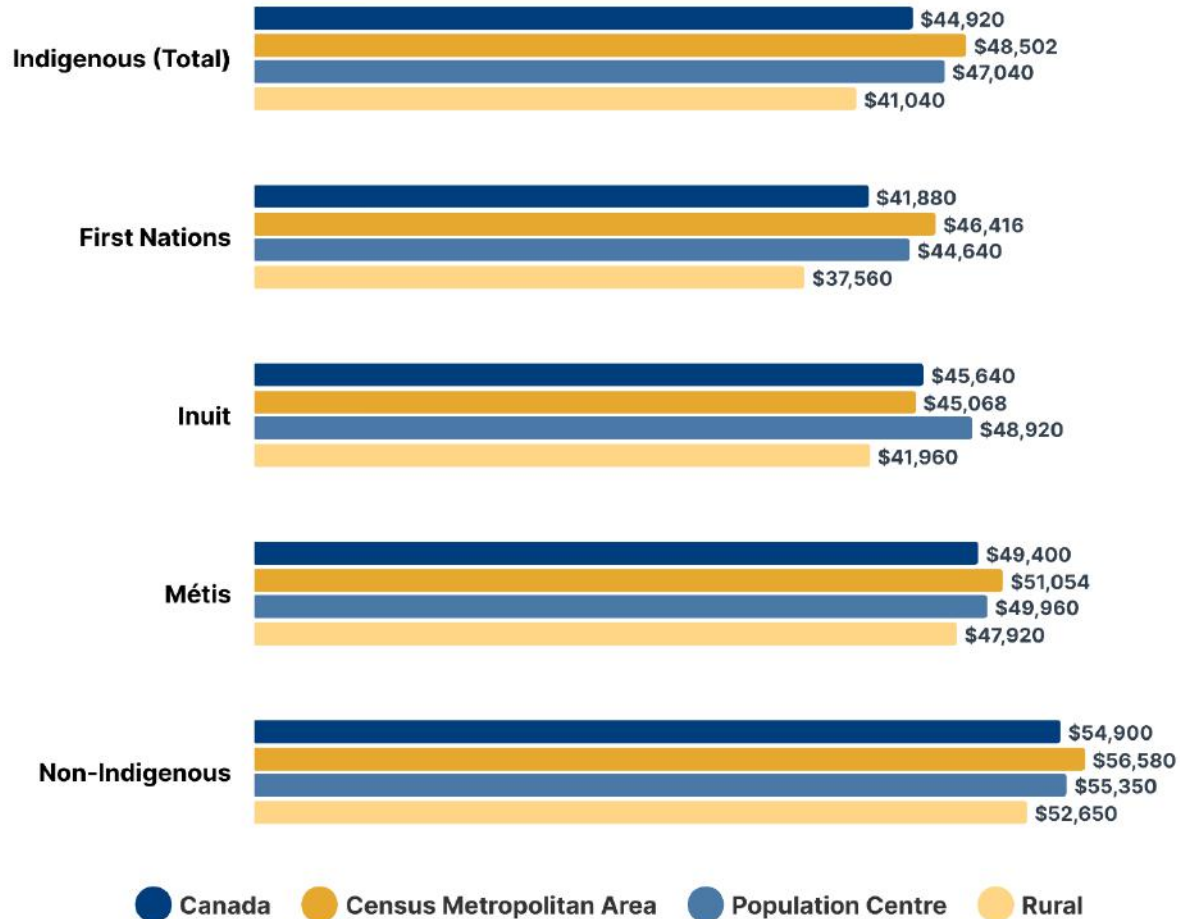
- Average income is higher in urban areas compared to rural areas and the rest of Canada across all identity groups.
- Non-Indigenous peoples earn higher average income in all geographic areas.
- Métis earn higher average income in all geographic areas amongst Indigenous groups.
- Inuit earn the lowest average income in CMAs while First Nations earn the lowest in POPCTRs.
- First Nations earn the lowest average income in rural areas.
- The average income gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples gets smaller in urban areas and gets much larger in rural areas.

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<sup>33</sup> Statistics Canada. (2022, September 23). *How the Census counts Indigenous people in urban areas.*

Figure 21: Average Income by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021

## Average Income by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations, 2021 Census of Population

Figure 22 displays median income in 2021 by identity group in urban and rural areas in comparison to the rest of Canada. For median income, Indigenous Peoples in CMAs, POPCTRs, and rural areas earned \$36,000, \$36,400, and \$32,000; First Nations earned \$34,400, 34,000, and \$29,600; Inuit earned \$34,000, \$34,800, and \$31,200; Métis earned \$39,600, \$39,600, and \$38,400; and non-Indigenous peoples earned \$42,000, \$41,600, and \$40,800, respectively.

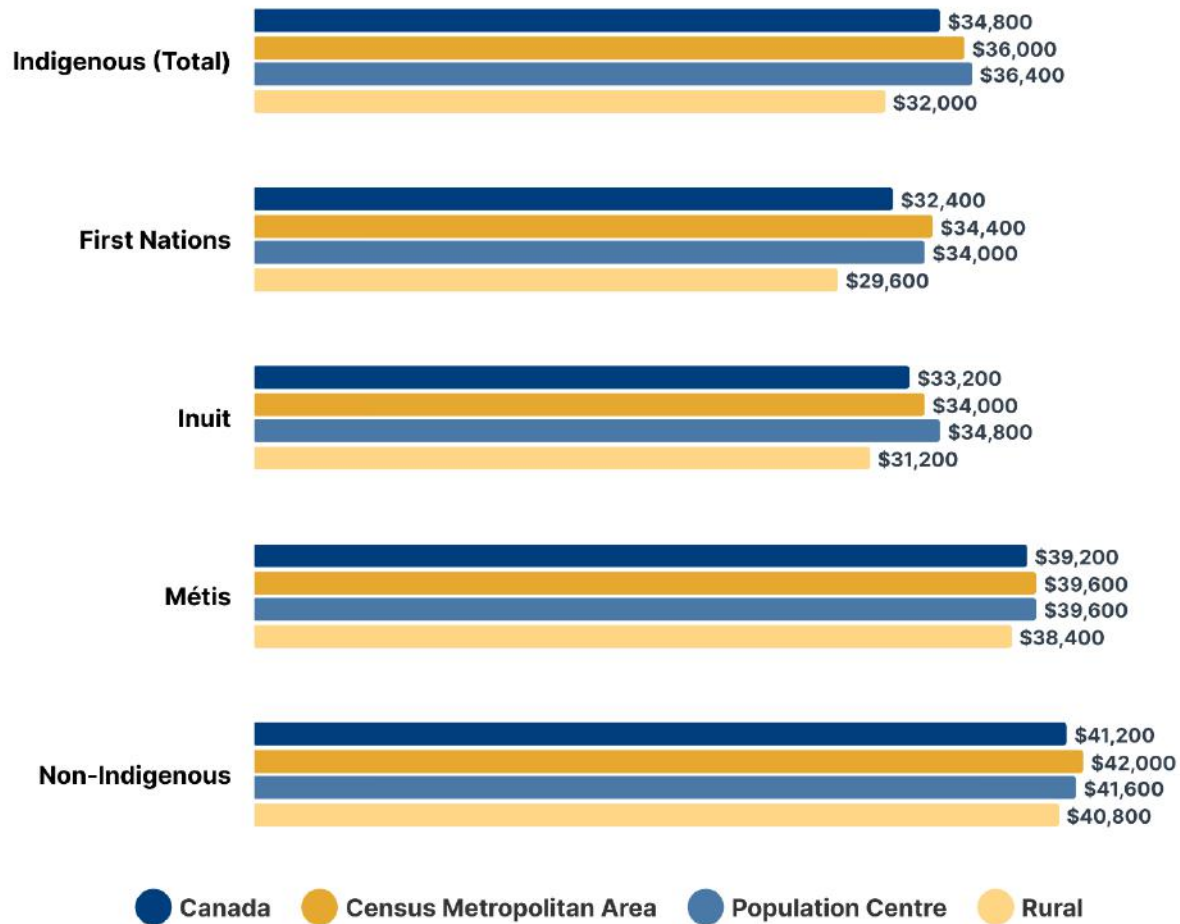
The trends observed in median income are similar to those identified in average income and are depicted as follows:

- Median income is higher in urban areas in comparison to rural areas and the rest of Canada.
- Non-Indigenous peoples earn higher median income in all geographic areas.
- Métis earn higher median income in areas amongst Indigenous groups.
- First Nations earn the lowest in CMAs while Inuit earn the lowest in POPCTRs.
- First Nations earn the lowest in rural areas.

- The gap in median income between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is smaller in urban areas and larger in rural areas.

Figure 22: Median Income by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021

## Median Income by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations, 2021 Census of Population

- Average and median income is highest in urban areas and lowest in rural areas for all identity groups.
- Non-Indigenous peoples earn higher average and median incomes in all geographic areas.
- Métis earn higher average and median incomes amongst the Indigenous groups in all geographic areas.
- Inuit earn the lowest average and median incomes in census metropolitan areas while First Nations earn the lowest in population centres.
- First Nations earn the lowest average and median incomes in rural areas.
- The average and median income gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples improves in urban areas while gets much worse in rural areas.

## Composition of Income

This section explores the composition of income in more detail. In examining median income levels for both occupation and industry across identity groups, similar hierarchical trends can be observed between each occupation and industry. In other words, by plotting the occupation and industry median income levels in increasing order, there is a similar increasing order for all groups.

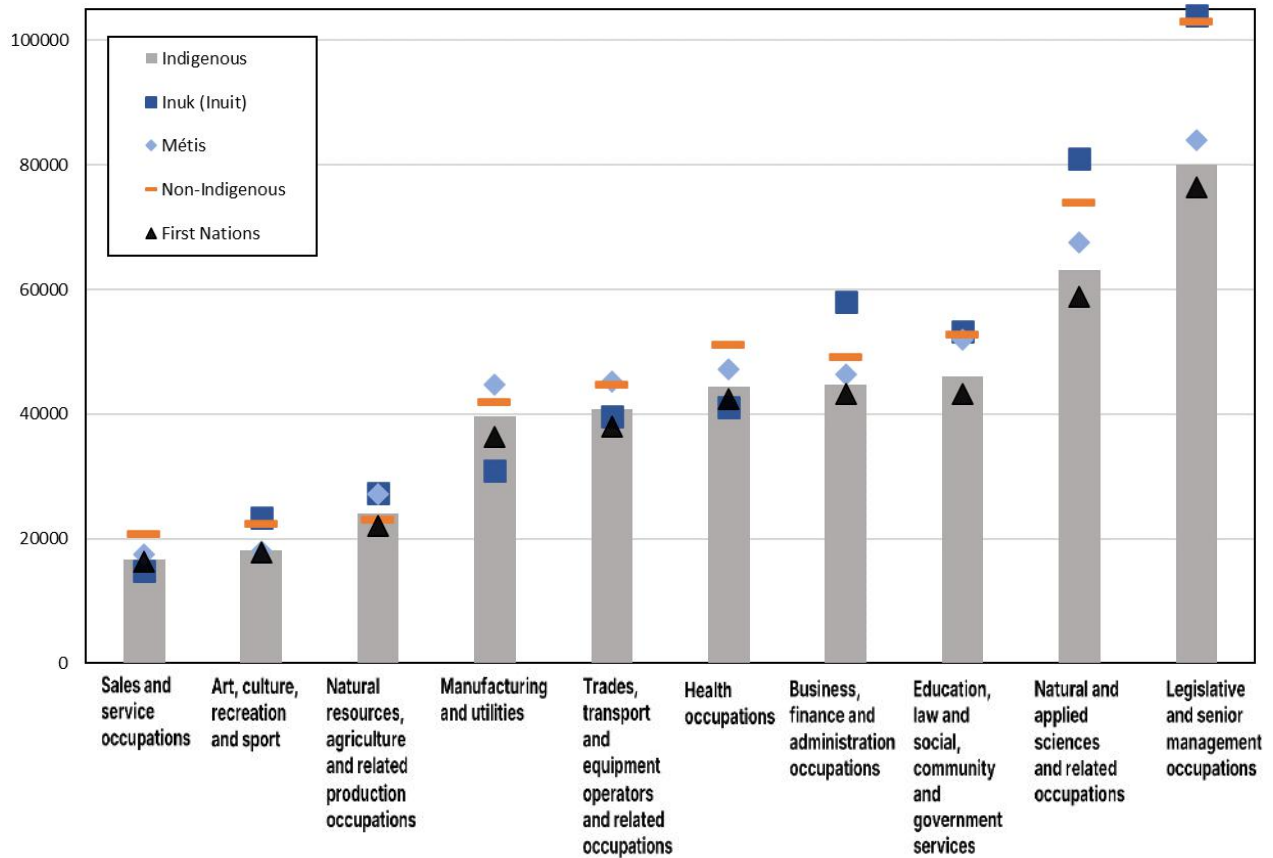
For example, occupations such as sales and service have the lowest median income level for all identity groups, while legislative and senior management positions have the highest median income level for all identity groups (Figure 23). Within the highest earning occupation (legislative and senior management), Inuit earn the highest incomes. One likely reason for this is that the Inuit experience the highest cost of living among all identity groups and salaries tend to be adjusted for this.

With respect to industry type, the accommodation and food services industries have the lowest median income for all groups, while the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction industries have the highest median income for all groups, except the Métis (Figure 24). Métis appear to be experiencing the most success in median income for almost all industries compared to other Indigenous groups. However, the Métis still earn less than the non-Indigenous group in almost all industries.

Although the trend in median income looks promising in specific occupations and industries, the Indigenous population still earns less in almost all occupation and industry categories compared to the non-Indigenous population.

Figure 23: Median Employment Income by Identity Group and Occupation, 2020

## Median Employment Income by Occupation and Identity, 2020

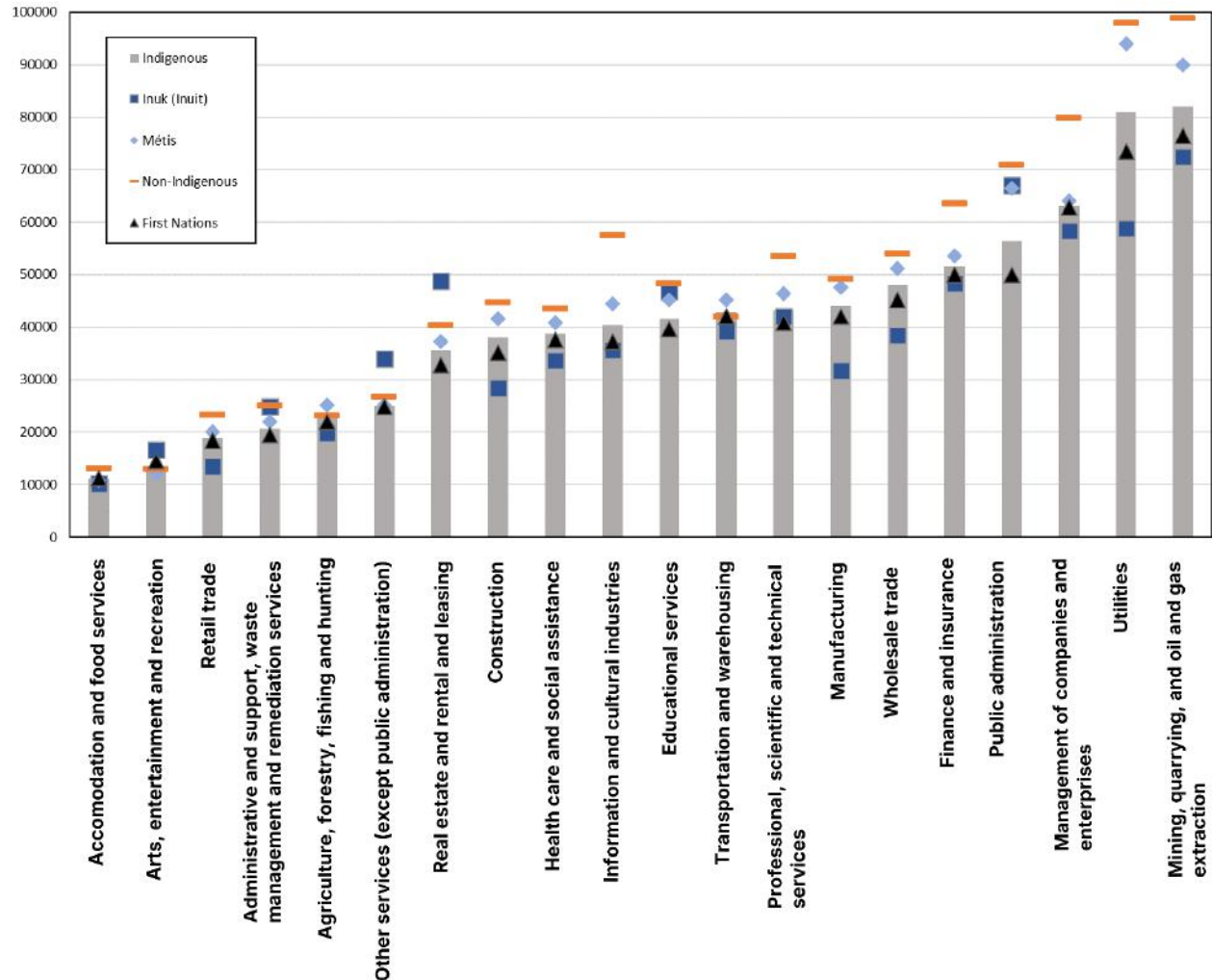


Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_9), 2021 Census of Population



Figure 24: Median Employment Income by Identity Group and Industry, 2020

## Median Employment Income by Industry and Identity, 2020

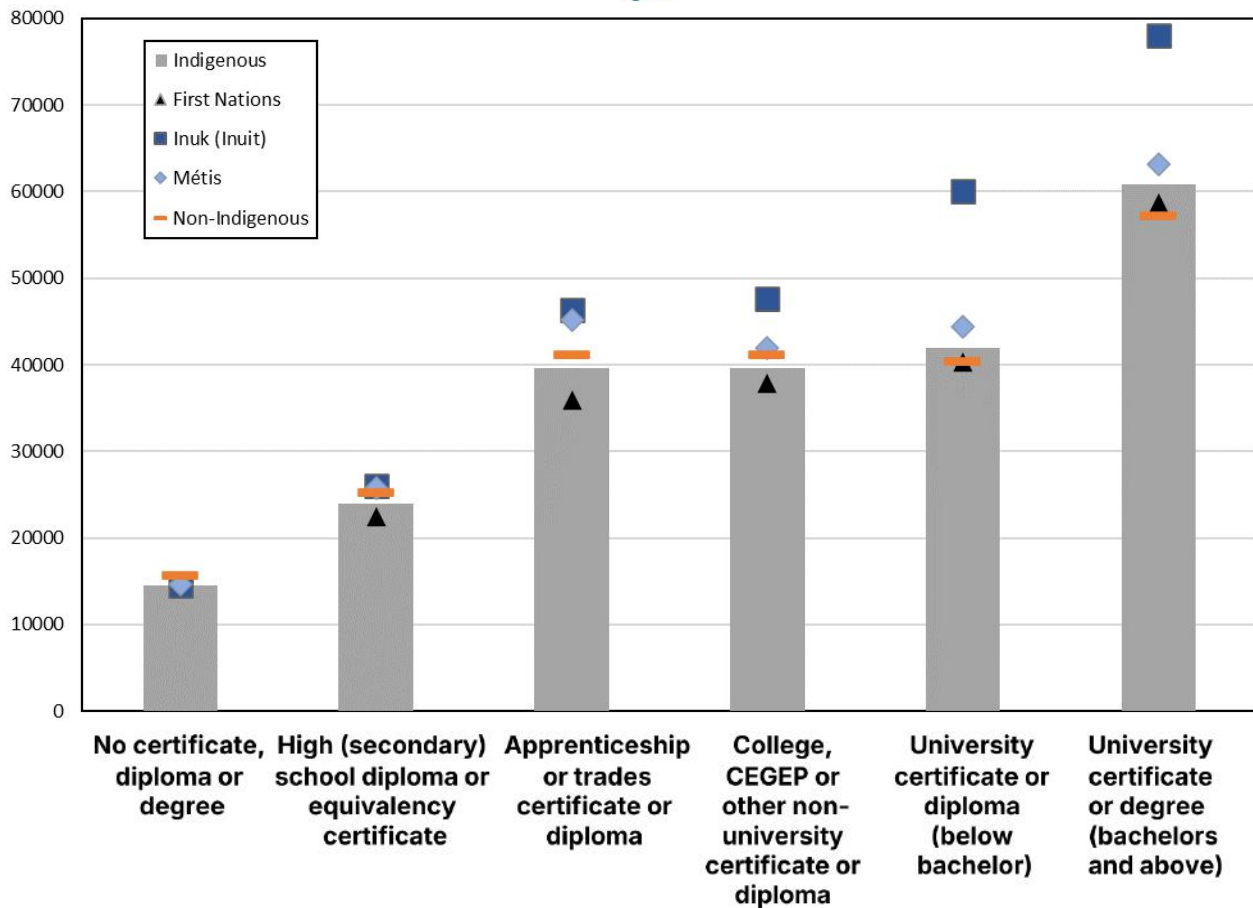


Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_10), 2021 Census of Population

When factoring in education level, the income gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations appears to be minimal. However, notable differences do exist (Figure 25). Inuit who have education levels beyond high school, especially at the university level, have the highest median income. This observation is likely related to the distribution of the population across the north, where Inuit are most represented and where salaries and wages are higher because of the higher cost of living. Regardless of education level, First Nation Peoples have the lowest median income of all groups, although it is not a large difference.

Figure 25: Median Employment Income by Education Level and Identity Group, 2020

## Median Employment Income by Education Level and Identity, 2020



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_11), 2021 Census of Population

- Legislative and Senior Management occupations are the highest earning occupations for the Indigenous population.
- Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas extraction industries are the highest earning industries for the Indigenous population.
- In Industries and Occupations where the Métis work, more than half of the population earn above Canada's median income level.
- When factoring in education, the gap in median income between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples is lower.
- With a university education, the indigenous population earns a slightly higher income than the non-Indigenous population. The Inuit who have a university education earn substantially more compared to all other groups.

## Gender-Specific Data on Median Income within Occupation and Industry

This chapter has drawn attention to the wage gap that exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in most occupations and industries. Gender disaggregated data revealed that this wage gap is also gendered, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous men typically earn more in the same occupations and industries than women.

Across the occupational categories, the median income for the overall Indigenous population was highest in legislative and senior management (\$80,000) and natural and applied sciences (\$63,200) in 2021. Within those occupations, however, men (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) earned more than their female counterparts. These findings are in line with the 2015 census data. In legislative and senior management occupations, the median income for men in the overall Indigenous population was \$85,000, but only \$75,000 for women. In natural and applied sciences occupations, the median income for men in the overall Indigenous population was \$66,500, but only \$56,000 for women. These gender gaps are also apparent in the occupational categories with the lowest media incomes, such as sales and service, and art, culture, recreation, and sport.

Generally, Indigenous and non-Indigenous men earn more than women in legislative and senior management occupations, except among Inuit, where women earned 47.8 percentage points more than men in 2021. Similarly, Inuit women earned more than their male counterparts in occupations in art, culture, recreation, and sport by 13.9 percentage points. Within health occupations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous men typically earn more than women, except among the First Nations on reserve population, where women earned 18.2 percentage points more than their male counterparts. This reversed gender gap was also observed in occupations in education, law, and social, community, and governance services, where First Nation women on reserve earned 2.2 percentage points more than First Nation men on reserve.

As was the case in 2015, the overall Indigenous population had the highest median income in the industry categories of mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (\$82,000) and utilities (\$81,000) in 2021. In both categories, the median income for Indigenous men was \$86,000, but only \$64,500 for women in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction, and \$65,500 for women in utilities. These gaps are relatively consistent with those found among the non-Indigenous population.

While men earn more than women in many industry categories, the median income for women is higher than that of men in some categories among the Inuit and First Nation on reserve populations. Inuit women earn more than their male counterparts in five industry categories: administrative and support, waste management and remediation services; educational services; accommodation and food services; other services; and public administration. For First Nations on reserve, women earn more than men in five categories as well: finance and insurance; real estate and rental and leasing; educational services; health care and social assistance; and public administration. While Inuit women earned more than Inuit women in some industry categories in 2015, the reversing of the gender gaps among First Nations on reserve was new in the 2021 census.

- In general, men earn more than women in the same occupations and industries, compounding the wage gap existing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.
- Amongst Inuit and First Nations on reserve, the gender wage gap is reversed in some industry and occupational categories.

## Income Inequality and Low Income

Many measures of income inequality exist. One of the most common and widely used is the Gini coefficient. The Gini coefficient was developed by statistician Corrado Gini and is a statistical measure designed to estimate the relative dispersion of income intended to capture or represent income inequality. Values for the Gini coefficient range between 0 (perfect equality) and 1 (perfect inequality). A value of 0 would mean that everyone in the population earns the same income, whereas a value of 1 would occur if one person or few persons earn all the income.

Most national governments and international development organizations like the World Bank, the United Nations, and Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) use the Gini coefficient to estimate income inequality. Often, the measure is used to make international comparisons or to give insight within a country's borders. For example, in 2020, Canada had a Gini coefficient of 0.280 and ranked 10<sup>th</sup> of the 38 countries within the OECD. Thus, Canada had more income equality compared to a majority of member countries in the OECD.

The Gini coefficient has been a staple income inequality measure used in the *IEPR* since its inception. The measure here is intended to capture income inequality amongst three Indigenous groups in Canada and to make comparisons with the non-Indigenous population. In the 2016 Aboriginal Economic Progress Report, data showed that the Indigenous population had a more unequal income distribution (0.407) compared to the non-Indigenous population (0.394), a 0.013-point gap, which was a decrease of 0.03 points from the 2005 Aboriginal Economic Progress Report.

The 2021 Canadian Census presents a more appealing picture regarding income inequality (Table 3). The Indigenous population had a Gini coefficient value of 0.355, a reduction of 0.038 points from the previous Census. The non-Indigenous population had a Gini coefficient value of 0.356, making the two income inequality distributions virtually identical and decreasing the gap between the two by 0.014 points. Of all three Indigenous groups, the Métis had the least inequality (0.332), followed by (in order of the largest inequality) the Inuit (0.338) and First Nations (0.362). It is interesting to note that for all groups the Gini coefficient decreased over the last 5 years, indicating a decrease in inequitable distribution of income, most notably for all three Indigenous groups.

**Table 3: Gini Coefficient: Adjusted Total Income of Economic Family for all Person by Identity Group.**

Year	First Nations	Inuk (Inuit)	Métis	Total Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Gap
2005	0.413	0.364	0.373	0.407	0.391	0.016
2015	0.417	0.374	0.372	0.407	0.394	0.013
2020	0.362	0.338	0.332	0.355	0.356	-0.001

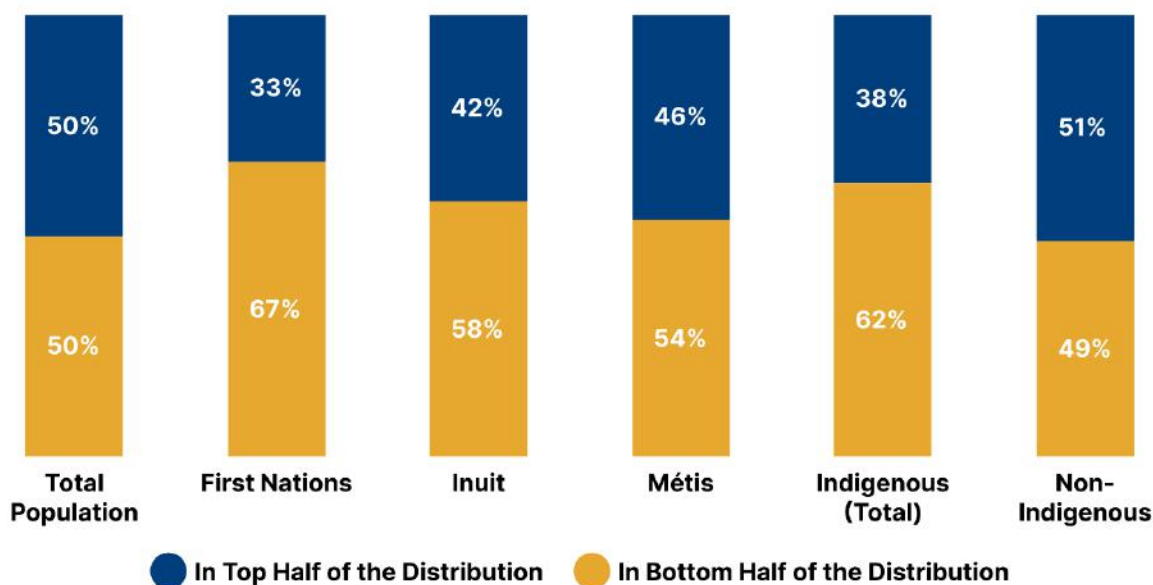
Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population

Another way to quantify income inequality is by comparing the percentage of the population in the top half of the income distribution to the percentage of the population in the bottom half (as shown in Figure

26). These values present a picture of how many people in the population are earning more than the bottom half of the income distribution and how many are earning below the top half of income distribution. In this case, the Indigenous population presented a much more unequal distribution of income compared to the non-Indigenous population, with a distribution skewed to the bottom half of the distribution.

**Figure 26: Percentage of Population in Top and Bottom Half of Income Distribution**

## Percentage of Population in Top and Bottom Half of Income Distribution



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population

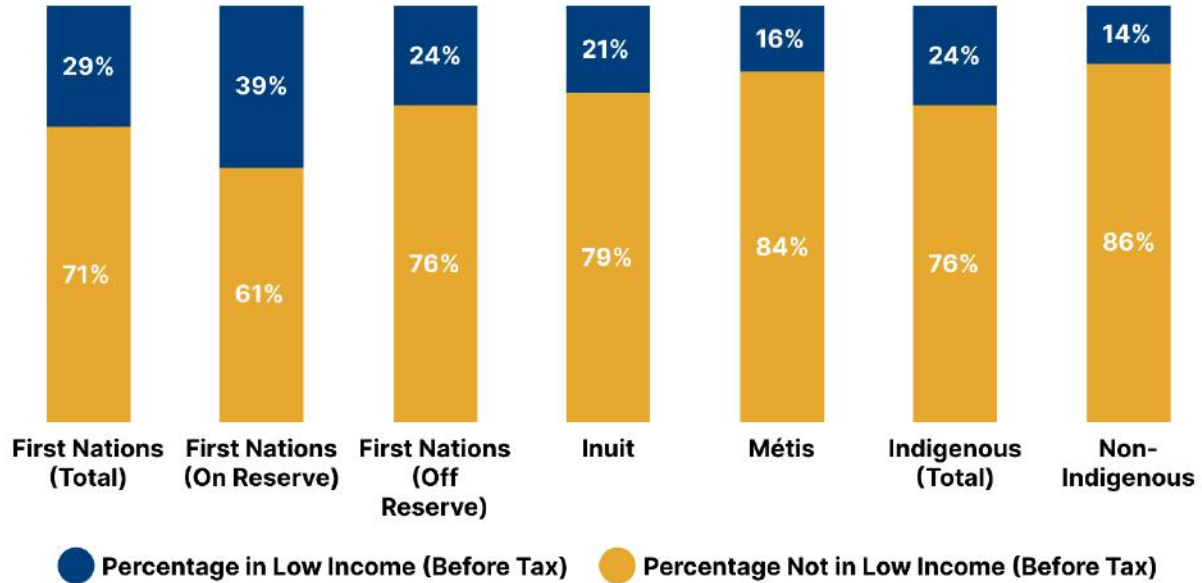
From the 2021 census, 38% of the Indigenous population were in the top half of the income distribution and 62% were in the bottom half. Comparatively, in the non-Indigenous population, 51% were in the top half of the income distribution and 49% were in the bottom half. Of all three Indigenous groups, the Métis population had the highest percentage of population in the top half of the income distribution with 46% and the First Nation population had the lowest with 33%.

Furthermore, Figure 27 displays the prevalence of low-income status based on the low-income measure by identity group. The Indigenous population has a much higher prevalence of being classified as low-income status compared to the non-Indigenous population, at 24% and 14%, respectively. First Nation populations have a higher prevalence of living in the low-income status (29%), compared to the Inuit (21%) and Métis (16%). First Nation Peoples living on reserve had a much higher prevalence of living in low-income status compared to their off-reserve counterparts, at 39% and 24% respectively.

Given these figures, the Indigenous population, regardless of group, has a much higher probability of living at or below the low-income measure. That probability increases substantially if the Indigenous person is living on reserve.

Figure 27: Prevalence of Low-Income Status Based on Low-Income Measure by Identity Group, 2020

## Prevalence of Low-Income Status Based on Low-Income Measure by Identity Group, 2020

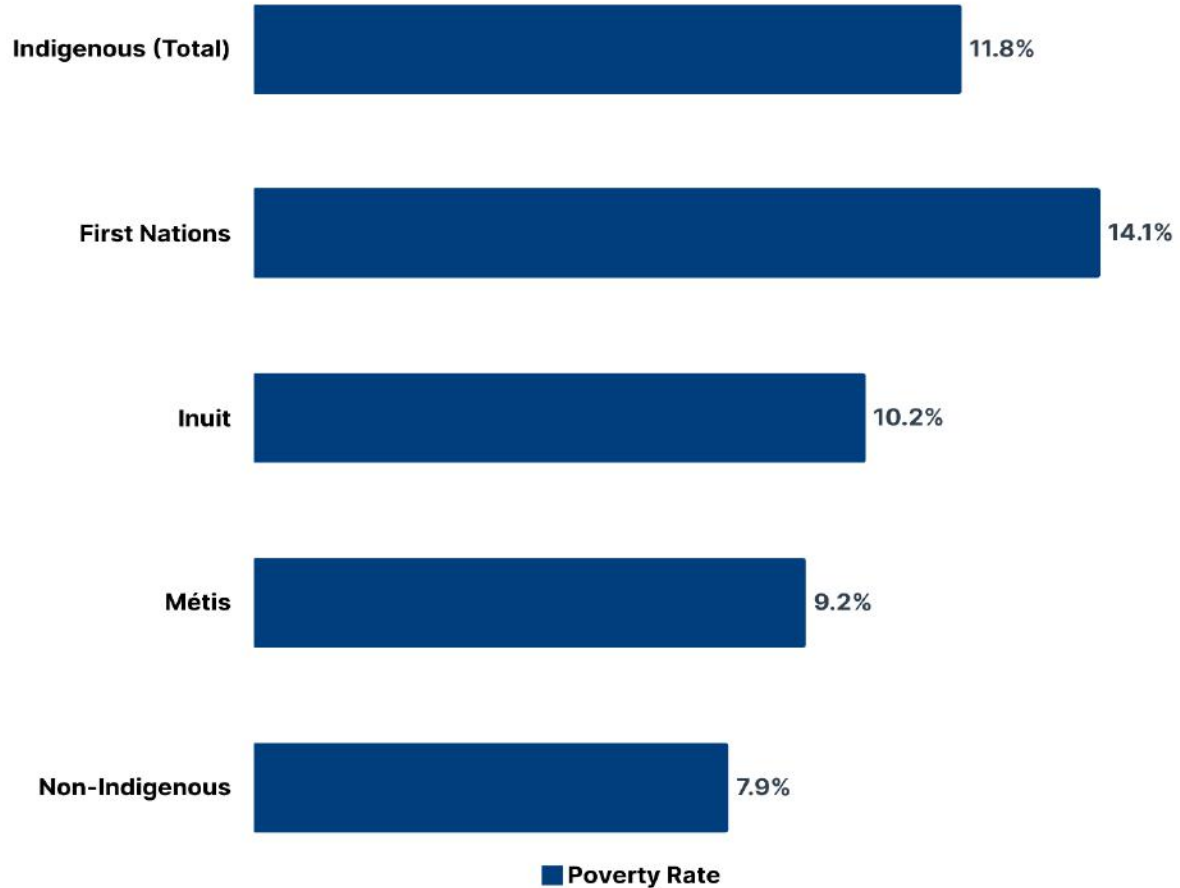


Source: Statistics Canada. (2022, September 21). *Individual low-income status by Indigenous identity and residence by Indigenous geography: Canada, provinces and territories.*

Figure 28 displays the individual Market Basket Measure (MBM) of poverty status by identity group in 2020. Indigenous Peoples have a much higher chance of being in poverty based on the MBM in 2020 compared to non-Indigenous peoples, with a poverty rate of 11.8 percent compared to 7.8 percent. Furthermore, First Nations have a much higher chance of being in poverty amongst the Indigenous groups, with a poverty rate of 14.1 percent, followed by Inuit at 10.2 percent and Métis at 9.2 percent.

Figure 28: Market Basket Measure (MBM) Poverty Status by Identity Group, 2020

## Market Basket Measure Poverty Status by Identity Group, 2020



Source: Statistic Canada (2022, October 26). *Individual Market Basket Measure poverty status by Indigenous groups and demographic characteristics: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts.*

- Income inequality has reduced for all groups, with the Gini Coefficient showing much more favorable numbers compared to the 2016 census.
- Income inequality measures, such as the Gini Coefficient, demonstrate similar levels of inequality for Indigenous Peoples and the non-Indigenous population.
- However, when comparing the top half of the income distribution to the bottom half of the income distribution, the Indigenous population is still more unequal.
- The Indigenous population, especially on-reserve First Nations, have a higher prevalence of living in low-income status compared to the non-Indigenous population.
- Furthermore, based on the MBM of poverty status, the Indigenous population have a higher poverty rate, especially for First Nations, compared to the Indigenous population.

## Conclusion

As discussed in this chapter, income disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals remain, despite some narrowing. The fact that the gap is narrowing due to an increase in proportion of income received through government transfers is not as promising in terms of income equality as it would seem. When looking at gender-specific data, the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is smaller than that between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men. This indicates greater income parity among women than men, a trend that has been observed over time.

In addition, there is a concentration of Indigenous Peoples in lower-paying occupational categories and a representation in high-income industries as well. Since the 2019 *IEPR*, some progress has been made with respect to training opportunities in order to foster increased Indigenous representation in higher paying positions, however, more needs to be done with respect to internship opportunities. Internship opportunities that focus on pursuing employment in high income occupations, such as management and natural and applied science, paired with ensuring wage equity in those positions, may help to ensure that gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians are more rapidly closed.

This chapter has also identified that educational qualification is a precursor of high-income for Indigenous individuals, even more so than for non-Indigenous individuals. This statistic is an important incentive to focus on programming and policy that support Indigenous higher education. In addition, the showcasing of Indigenous successes in this regard to demonstrate Indigenous mentorship and leadership should be encouraged to enable students to envision the role of education in their future success.

First Nations on reserve continue to earn the least amount of average income in comparison to other Indigenous groups and to non-Indigenous individuals. This may be due to the environment on reserve and inequality that remains with respect to salary and benefits when compared to off-reserve occupations. Ensuring that organizations that operate on reserve are equipped to provide a competitive salary, benefits, and pension package would assist in ensuring that employees on reserve are retained and provided with a stable, equitable income.

### Recommendations:

- ***Develop and implement financial literacy programs tailored to Indigenous peoples of all ages. These programs should cover budgeting, saving, investing, and accessing credit to improve overall financial well-being and be implemented both in and outside school settings.***
- ***Ensure that Indigenous communities have access to inclusive financial services. This includes establishing bank branches, credit unions, and not-for-profit microfinance institutions in remote areas and offering culturally relevant financial products.***
- ***Provide increased support to Indigenous income-creating organizations (e.g. Indigenous Development Corporations and Land Trusts and Resource Management Entities), and structures that generate economic opportunities, support wealth creation and foster Indigenous self-determination.***



2019 IEPR Income recommendation requiring additional attention:

- ***Increase in training and internship opportunities for Indigenous employees in the industries that they are already working in.***

## CORE INDICATOR #3: COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

*“It is the responsibility of everyone sharing this land, both newer arrivals and those who have lived here for generations, to reflect on the truth of the past and work toward reconciliation with those who were and continue to be oppressed. Facing the truth and working toward true reconciliation will fulfill the promises of our country and the privileges and freedoms it represents.”*

– Métis Nation of Alberta President Audrey Poitras

### Community Well-Being Index Highlights

The Community Well-Being Index is a socio-economic measure designed to assess the well-being of individual communities based on the indicators of education, labour force activity, income and housing. It is derived from Statistics Canada's Census of Population (1981-2021) and the National Household Survey (2011). Defining well-being generally, and particularly in Indigenous communities, is challenging given its many different meanings across communities, cultures and individuals.

#### Overall Community Well-Being Score Gap

- From 1981 to 2021, the overall Community Well-Being score for First Nations Communities increased by 17.4 points. The largest gap closure in the past 4 decades occurred between 2016 and 2021, with the First Nations Community Well-Being score increasing by 4 points. This decreased the gap with the scores of the non-Indigenous population from 19.1 in 2016 to 16.3 in 2021.
  - From 1981 to 2021, the overall Community Well-Being score of Inuit communities increased by 14.1 points. The gap with the non-Indigenous community has been steadily widening since 2001 and widened even more for all 4 Inuit regions between 2016 and 2021 when the Inuit's score decreased by 0.7 points. This increased the gap with the scores of the non-Indigenous population from 16.2 points in 2016 to 18.1 in 2021.
- 1.9 points since 2016 for Inuit Communities** (indicated by an upward arrow)
- 2.8 points since 2016 for First Nations Communities** (indicated by a downward arrow)
- The number of First Nations Communities with an overall Community Well-Being score below 50 has dropped significantly since 1981. The range in overall Community Well-Being scores for First Nations Communities also decreased between 2016 and 2021, indicating growing equality among First Nations.
  - The number of Inuit communities with a Community Well-Being score below 50 has decreased significantly since 1981 but increased between 2016 and 2021. The variation in overall Community Well-Being scores for Inuit communities increased between 2016 and 2021, indicating increasing inequality among Inuit communities.
  - Regionally, First Nations Community Well-Being average scores are lowest in the Prairies, with Manitoba First Nations Communities demonstrating gaps with non-Indigenous communities in excess of 25 points and all Prairie provinces demonstrating average scores below 53.0 (in comparison with other regional areas with values all above 60.0). Inuit Community Well-Being scores are lowest in Nunavut, followed by Quebec, Northwest Territories and Newfoundland from lowest scores to highest.
  - Additional analysis is required in order to be able to understand why trends are presenting the way they are, including the potential effects of COVID-19.

#### Labour Force Activity Score

For the labour force activity indicator in 2021, First Nations Communities averaged a score of 70.1 and Inuit scored 73.7, representing gaps with the non-Indigenous population of 14.2 and 10.6 points, respectively.

#### Education Score

For the education indicator in 2021, First Nations Communities averaged a score of 42.4 and Inuit scored 32.2, representing gaps with the non-Indigenous population of 15.6 and 25.8 points, respectively.

#### Income Score

For the income indicator in 2021, First Nations Communities averaged a score of 62.4 and Inuit scored 70.3, representing gaps with the non-Indigenous population of 15.2 and 7.3 points, respectively.

#### Housing Score

For the housing indicator in 2021, First Nations Communities averaged a score of 74.5 and Inuit scored 66.2, representing gaps with the non-Indigenous population of 20.4 and 28.7 points, respectively.

## Introduction

Findings from the 2021 Community Well-Being (CWB) Index demonstrate overall improvements across First Nation, Inuit, and non-Indigenous communities; however, gaps with non-Indigenous communities remain essentially unchanged. The CWB Index is a socio-economic measure designed to assess the well-being of individual communities based on the indicators of education, labour force activity, income, and housing. These factors do not represent an exhaustive list of all of the dimensions of well-being, but rather focus on select aspects of well-being where data is readily available. A community's CWB index score is a single number that can range from a low of zero to a high of one hundred. Statistics for this index are derived from Statistics Canada's Census of Population (1981-2021) and the National Household Survey (2011). CWB scores provide a means to compare well-being over time for First Nation and Inuit communities with well-being scores in non-Indigenous communities.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, perceptions of well-being may vary between individuals according to several factors, including geographic location, economy, culture, and language. As such, there is no universally accepted definition of well-being; however, it is generally accepted as referring to the social, economic, health, and political conditions needed to live enjoyable, fulfilling lives. This is particularly true of Indigenous well-being and factors that may impact one's perceptions of well-being that differ from the non-Indigenous population. The 2019 Routledge Handbook of Indigenous Wellbeing posits that policymakers must incorporate a fulsome understanding of factors that are central to Indigenous well-being by sharing knowledge and lessons learned, as this report aims to do.

In this chapter, the different way of defining Indigenous well-being will be discussed, including an overview of the CWB Index and its different factors. The trends in socio-economic well-being over time, including the gaps that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups and ways in which socio-economic improvements may be made will also be reviewed. It is important to note that CWB scores are calculated at the community level and therefore, gender-specific and individual data is unavailable at this time.

## Defining Indigenous Well-Being

Defining Indigenous well-being has overarching themes of what is considered to be important to Indigenous culture. It is important to consider that there are many different Nations and Indigenous communities across Canada, and each one may define well-being differently as it pertains to their values and history.

According to Simon Fraser University's piece on economic reconciliation entitled *What is Indigenous Well-being?* (2020):

"It's all about what's in our hearts and our true intention for what we want to see for the greater well-being of all things. It's going beyond yourself, to know that your power is so great that it can

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<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that the CWB index cannot be calculated for Métis nations. While there are eight Métis-designated settlement areas recognized by the Province of Alberta, they are not part of Statistics Canada's standard geography (census subdivisions) used to identify municipalities or their equivalent on which the CWB is based. Because it is based on population rather than geography, ISC's application of the Human Development Index (HDI) includes the Métis.

influence energy and create a new reality. Well-being is in our souls, spirits, hearts and the goodness we bring to our lives, our families, community and to all living creatures. To be willing to move outside of yourself, your comfort zone, your knowing, and be willing to explore and accept something bigger than who and what you are currently are. It's about forgiveness, healing, empathy, equity, equality, reconciliation, trust, relationships, and truth."

"Well-being is about being in space together for the collective wellness for everyone and everything. It's about community and our connectedness through the relationships we create and harness together. It's in our word, Yuusténaṁut cht (Yo-STUN-ah-moat chit), which means "we take care of ourselves" in the Sk̄w̄x̄w̄ú7mesh language and the Kwakwaka'wakw phrase 'Namwayut, which means "we are all one" and so many other Indigenous words and phrases across our territories regionally and nationally that translate into our collective wellness."

It must also be noted that the factors comprising the CWB index may not be central to Indigenous identity and may focus on non-Indigenous ideations. For example, Indigenous conceptions of well-being tend to focus on the collective rather than the individual. Also, the CWB may not take into consideration important context such as how a history of colonialization can impact one's perception of well-being.<sup>35</sup>

#### Well-being Internationally

##### **New Zealand**

*In Aotearoa-New Zealand, Indigenous well-being is defined using Indicators Aotearoa-New Zealand and Living Standards Framework. Throughout the process of creating the Indicators, the Māori people were consulted in order to ensure accuracy and due diligence from the New Zealand government. Māori understanding of well-being comes from social, cultural, environmental, economic and contextual areas. Moreover, the Māori have a Te Wheke (The Octopus), which represents the tenets of well-being according to Māori values. In sum, the Octopus represents the varying dimensions of health as it interrelates to and between the spirit, the mind, family, and the physical world.*

##### **Australia**

*Similar to Canada, the Australian definition of well-being, as it pertains to Indigenous peoples, varies per group but there are themes. Australian government is working to close the gaps between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians through various organizations. Recently, the Australian government published the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing (2017). Within this framework, there are two separate charts that outline Indigenous understandings of social/emotional well-being and mental health. Briefly, well-being is understood as connections to: Culture; Mind and Emotions; Family and Kinship; Body; Community; Country; and Spirituality and Ancestors.*

##### **Scandinavia**

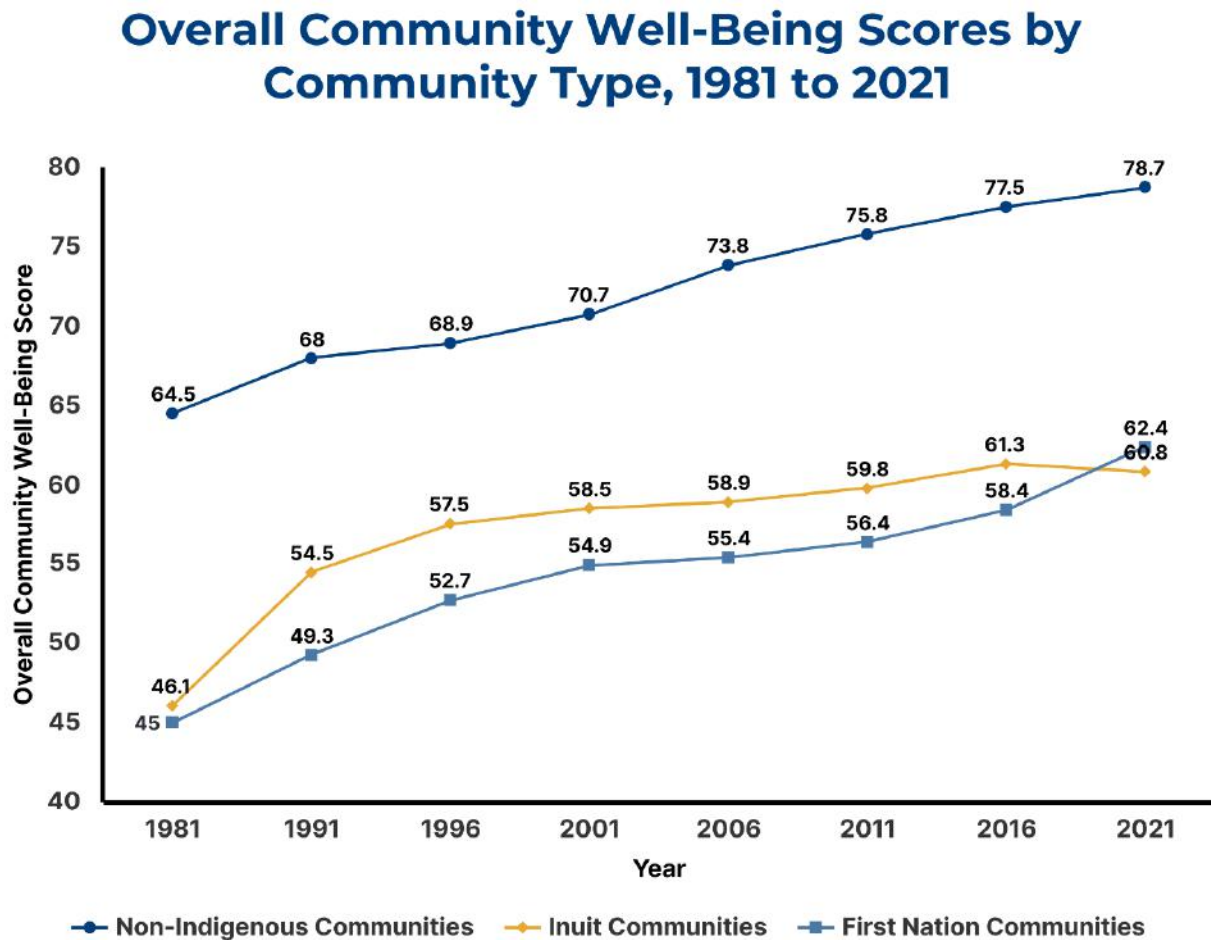
*The Sami are an Indigenous group in Scandinavia, scattered throughout the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. Norway has the highest population of Sami people. While there are no formal tools or frameworks for measuring Indigenous well-being specifically in Scandinavian countries, there is merit into researching what views the Sami people hold as it pertains to their health and well-being. There is limited research into this particular group, but the Sami can provide an interesting point of view due to their culture and regional differences. Sweden, in particular, is working towards understanding Sami health and culture in order to address the issue of high suicide rates amongst Sami populations.*

<sup>35</sup> Fleming, C. & Manning, M. (2019). *2019 Routledge Handbook of Indigenous Wellbeing*. Routledge International Handbooks.

## 2021 Community Well-Being Index

As described above, the CWB Index is a means to measure socio-economic well-being in First Nation, Inuit and non-Indigenous communities over time. It is a useful tool to demonstrate gaps and improvements in socio-economic status. The 2021 CWB Index compared results from 623 First Nations Communities and 50 Inuit communities with 3781 non-Indigenous communities.

Figure 29: Overall CWB Scores by Community Type, 1981 to 2021



Source: Indigenous Services Canada. Custom Tabulations, Censuses of Population, 1981 to 2006, 2016, 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

While overall improvements are seen from the 2021 CWB Index, there are still gaps with non-Indigenous communities. Figure 29 depicts CWB scores across First Nation and Inuit communities and compares them against non-Indigenous CWB scores, and against themselves. With respect to First Nations Communities, scores have steadily increased from 1981 to 2021. In fact, from 1981 to 2021, the increase in CWB scores for First Nations demonstrates the largest between consecutive Census in the past four decades and indicates a substantial improvement in socio-economic well-being.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the gap between First

<sup>36</sup> Thiessen, C. & Tran, L. (2024). *Overview of the Community Well-Being index, 1981 to 2021*. Indigenous Services Canada.

Nation and non-Indigenous CWB scores has narrowed over the years, but there remains a notable gap in 2021.

With respect to Inuit, CWB scores are more uneven. Average CWB scores increased from 1981 to 2021, however a decrease in scores occurred between 2016 and 2021. In contrast to First Nations, the gap between Inuit and non-Indigenous CWB has widened between 2016 and 2021.

## National Socio-Economic Gaps

The trends referenced above represent major milestones with respect to socio-economic well-being in Indigenous communities. Despite this, significant gaps between overall CWB scores between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities remain. From 1981 to 2021, despite the rising trend, CWB scores for First Nations and Inuit have been consistently lower than the non-Indigenous population. While there are many factors that may contribute to consistently lower scores, one main reason may be the differences in definition and perceptions of well-being, unequal access to sub-component items such as education and housing, and geographic location.

- CWB Index values provide confirmation that while many of the indicators used in the calculation of the Index have improved, their improvement across all communities continue to maintain the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. First Nations Communities continue to exhibit a gap of 16 points, while Inuit communities exhibit a gap in excess of 18 points.
- First Nations Communities in the Prairies demonstrate CWB values of approximately 10 points below First Nations Communities in other regions, increasing the gap to an excess of 25 points from non-Indigenous communities in corresponding provinces (see Regional Chapter for additional regional CWB score information).

## National Component CWB Scores

The CWB index is made up of the following four components and subcomponents:

- Education (which is based on the proportion of community members aged 20 years and over with at least a high school education and the proportion of those aged 25 and over with a university degree);
- Labour force activity (which is based on the proportion of community members (aged 20 to 64) participating in the labour force and the proportion of labour force participants (aged 20 to 64) who are employed);
- Income (which is calculated based on a community's total income per capita); and,
- Housing (which is based on the proportion of community members living in homes that do not require major repairs (quality) and are not overcrowded (quantity)).

The CWB component and subcomponent scores are combined to give each community an overall well-being score ranging from a low of 0 to a high of 100 and provide insight into changes over time in sub-component categories. Overall, scores for CWB components for First Nations steadily increased from 1981 to 2021, with the largest increases being for income and housing. The situation is similar in Inuit

communities, with all CWB component scores showing increases over 40 years. The income component is the component that has increased most significantly over this time period. During the most recent census period (2016-2021), Inuit communities saw a decrease in education and labour force activity (see Figure 30 and Figure 31 for additional details).

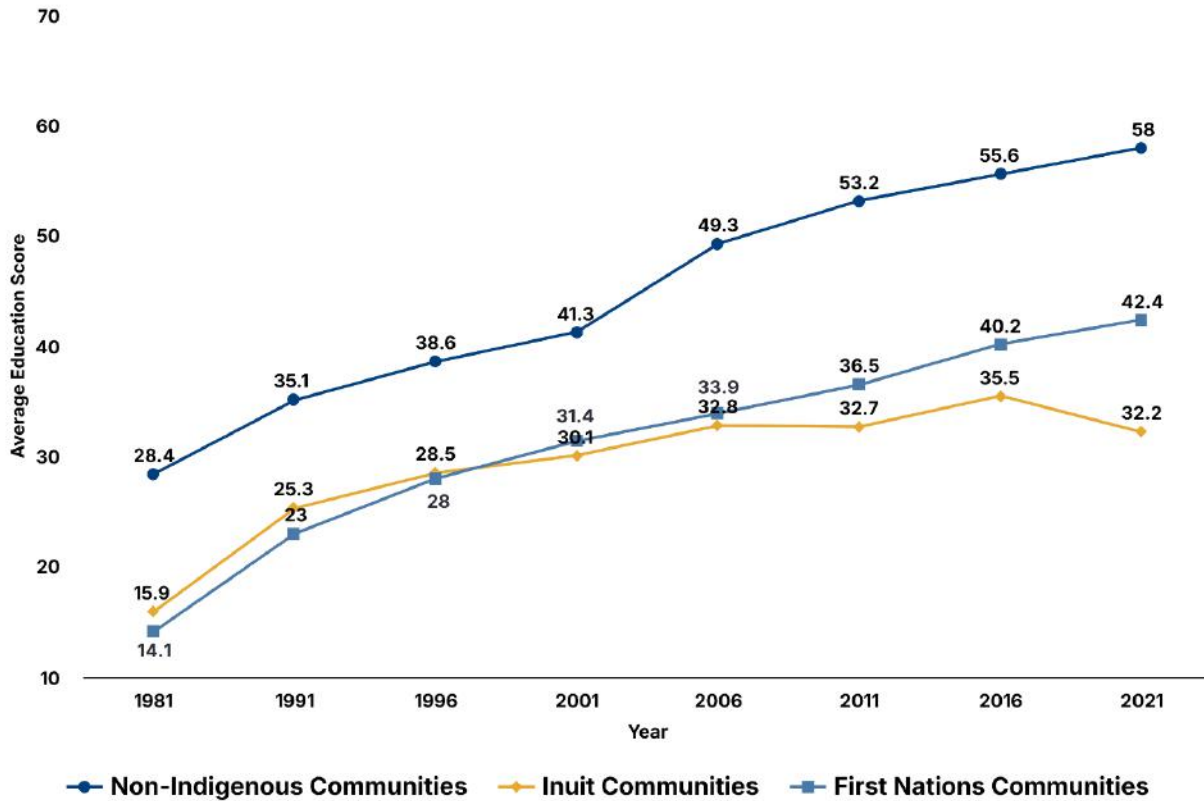
### Education

With respect to First Nations Communities, education component scores have been steadily on the rise since the 1980s. The latest rise (between 2016 and 2021) can be attributed to increased high-school and university degree achievements in First Nations Communities.

The situation in Inuit communities has not been as stable. Between 2016 and 2021, Inuit education scores decreased, leading to a gap of 25.8 points with the non-Indigenous community and 10.2 with First Nations. These gaps are the largest seen between 1981 and 2021. This drop was due to a lower high-school achievement score. For more detailed information on education in Indigenous communities, please refer to the Education chapter.

Figure 30: Average Education Scores by Community Type, 1981 to 2021

## Average Education Scores by Community Type, 1981 to 2021



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, Custom Tabulations, Censuses of Population, 1981 to 2006, 2016, 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

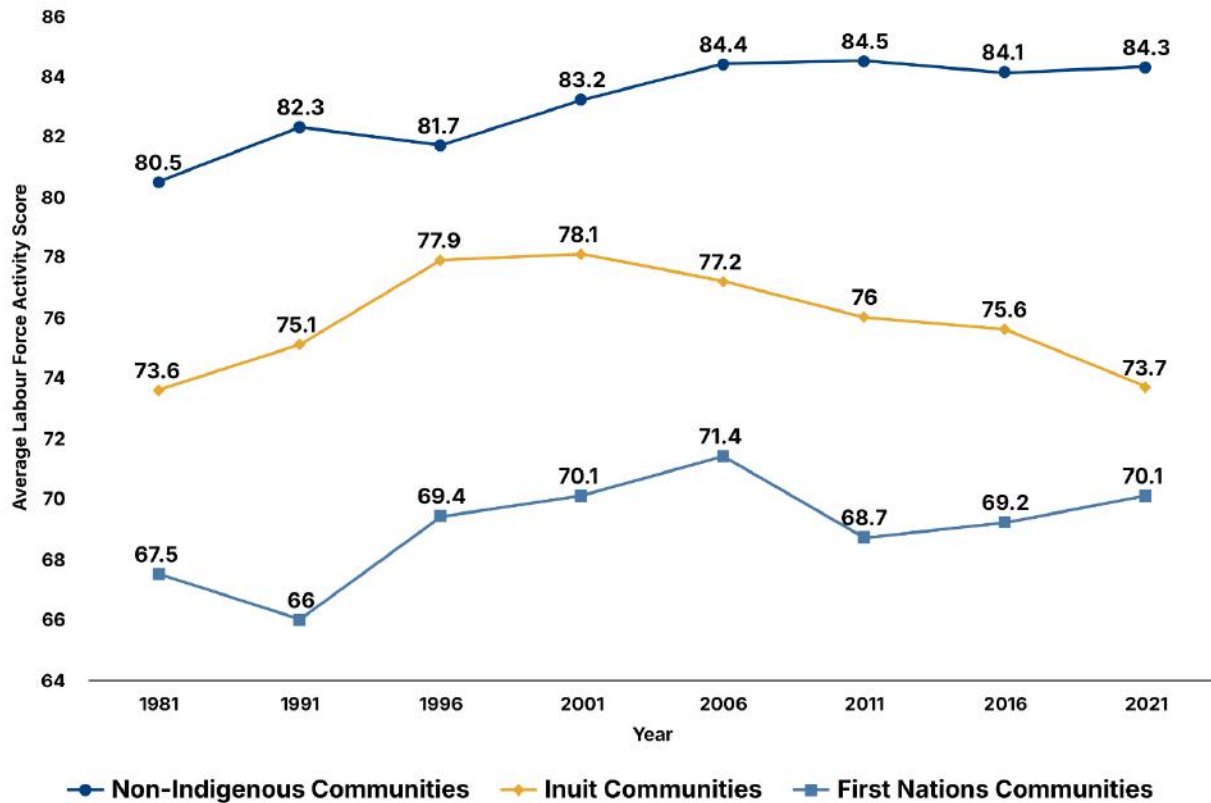
### Labour Force Activity

In comparison to labour force scores for non-Indigenous communities, which remained stable over 40 years, First Nations Communities varied, with an increase noted between 2016 and 2021. Conversely, Inuit scores have been on a downward trend, with 2021 scores being almost identical to scores obtained in 1981. Important gaps remain in the labour force activity scores of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous individuals. For more detailed information on Indigenous participation in the labour force, please refer to the Employment chapter.



Figure 31: Average Labour Force Activity Scores by Community Type, 1981 to 2021

## Average Labour Force Activity Scores by Community Type, 1981 to 2021



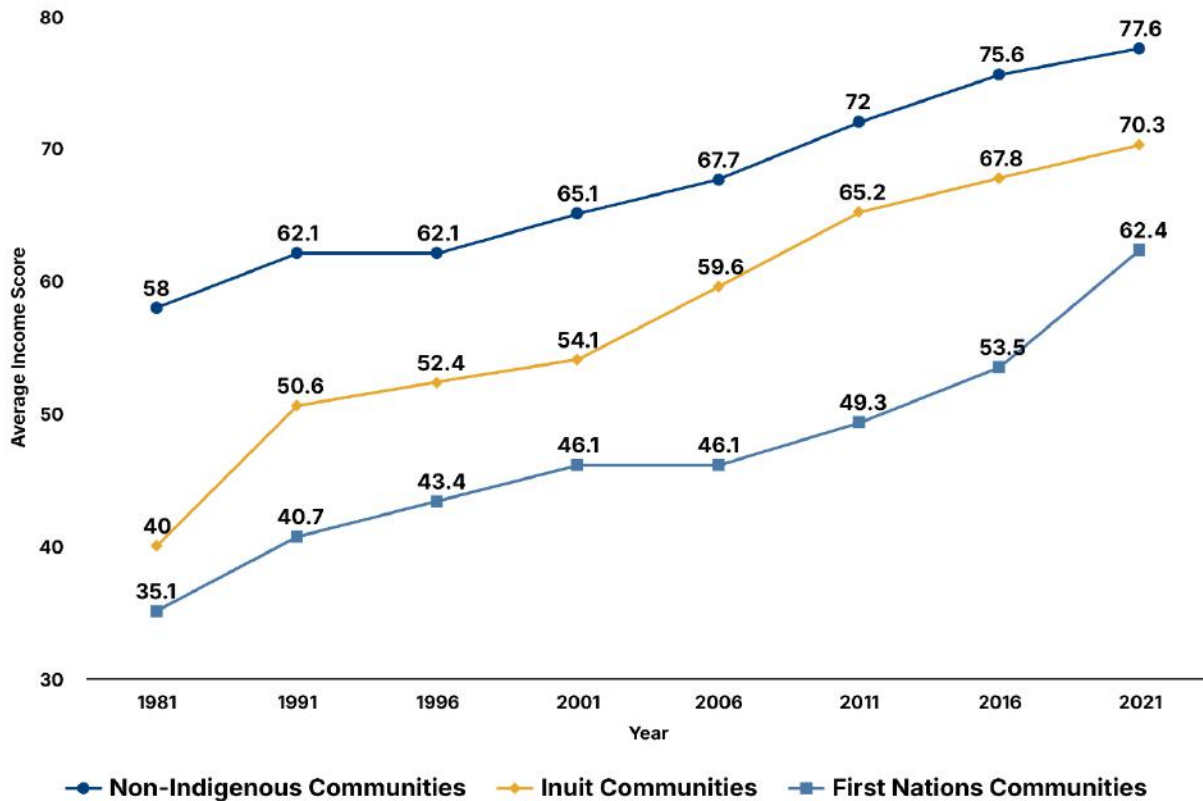
Source: Indigenous Services Canada, Custom Tabulations, Censuses of Population, 1981 to 2006, 2016, 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

### Income

Income scores for all groups (First Nations, Inuit, and Non-Indigenous) have been on the rise, with a notable increase from 2016 to 2021 for First Nations and Inuit. As with the other component scores, significant gaps persist with non-Indigenous communities with respect to income levels, however these gaps are narrowing (Figure 32).

Figure 32: Average Income Scores by Community Type, 1981 to 2021

## Average Income Scores by Community Type, 1981 to 2021



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, Custom Tabulations, Censuses of Population, 1981 to 2006, 2016, 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

### Housing

While continuing to trend upward, housing scores for Indigenous communities have only seen slight increases. Most notably, increases were realized from 1981 to 2001; however, since that time, housing scores have been unstable and have even declined in some instances. With respect to First Nations, housing trends saw a sharp increase in 2021; however, Inuit scores have remained stable and relatively unchanged. As with other component scores, there is a notable gap in housing scores between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities over the last 40 years (Figure 33).

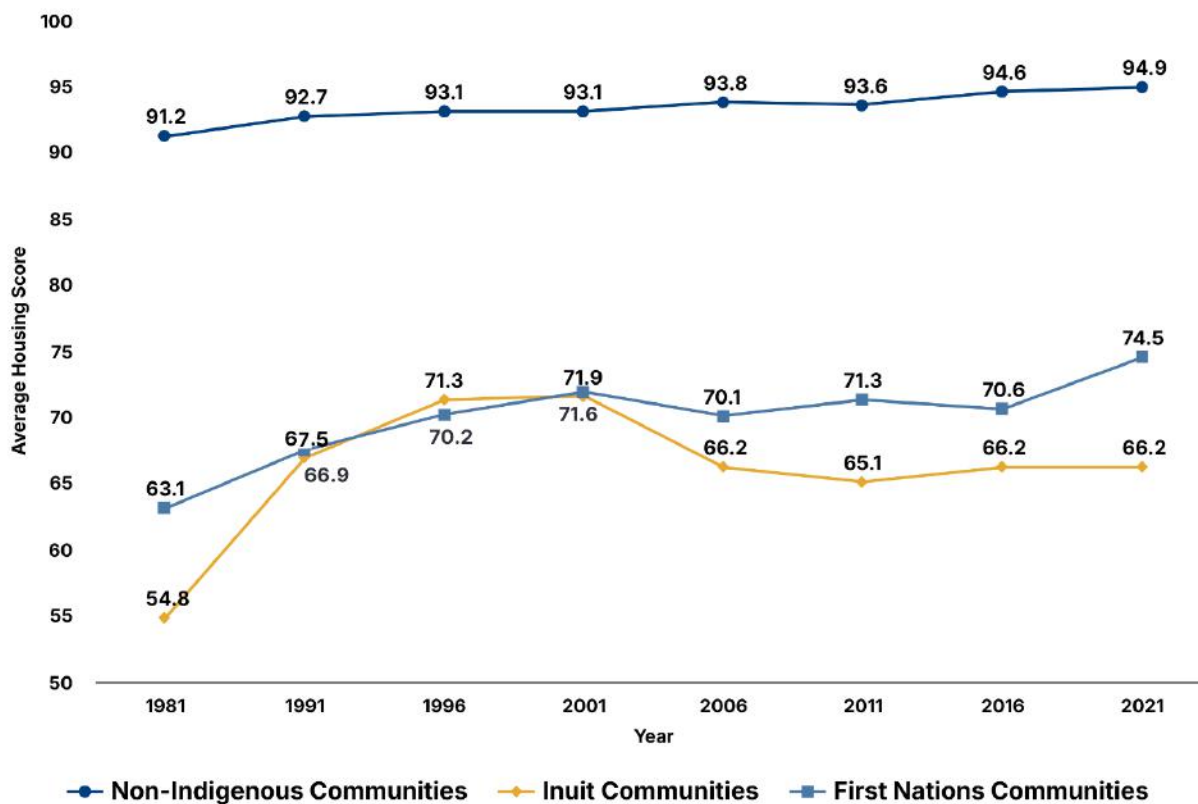
The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) recently released a report in 2024 on housing in First Nations Communities. The report noted that many people living in First Nations Communities lack access to safe and adequate housing. Paired with 2021 Census data, the report noted that people in First Nations Communities are four times more likely to live in crowded housing and six times more likely to live in housing in need of major repairs than non-Indigenous people.

Despite these audits, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation have additional work to do to make progress towards supporting the fundamental human right of Indigenous Peoples’ access to safe and stable housing. As part of the broader reconciliation process, ISC has a legislated a mandate to transfer its responsibilities, including housing, to First Nations. ISC is currently working with First Nations in the early stages of transferring control of housing and building an overarching policy framework to guide the department’s work.

To close the housing gap, the 2024 OAG reports that First Nations Communities need 55,320 new housing units and repairs to 80,650 existing units, at an estimated cost of \$44 billion. Ensuring safe and adequate housing for Indigenous communities remains a critical challenge, and addressing it is essential for their physical, mental, and economic well-being.

**Figure 33: Average Housing Scores by Community Type, 1981 to 2021**

## Average Housing Scores by Community Type, 1981 to 2021



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, Custom Tabulations, Censuses of Population, 1981 to 2006, 2016, 2021 and National Household Survey, 2011.

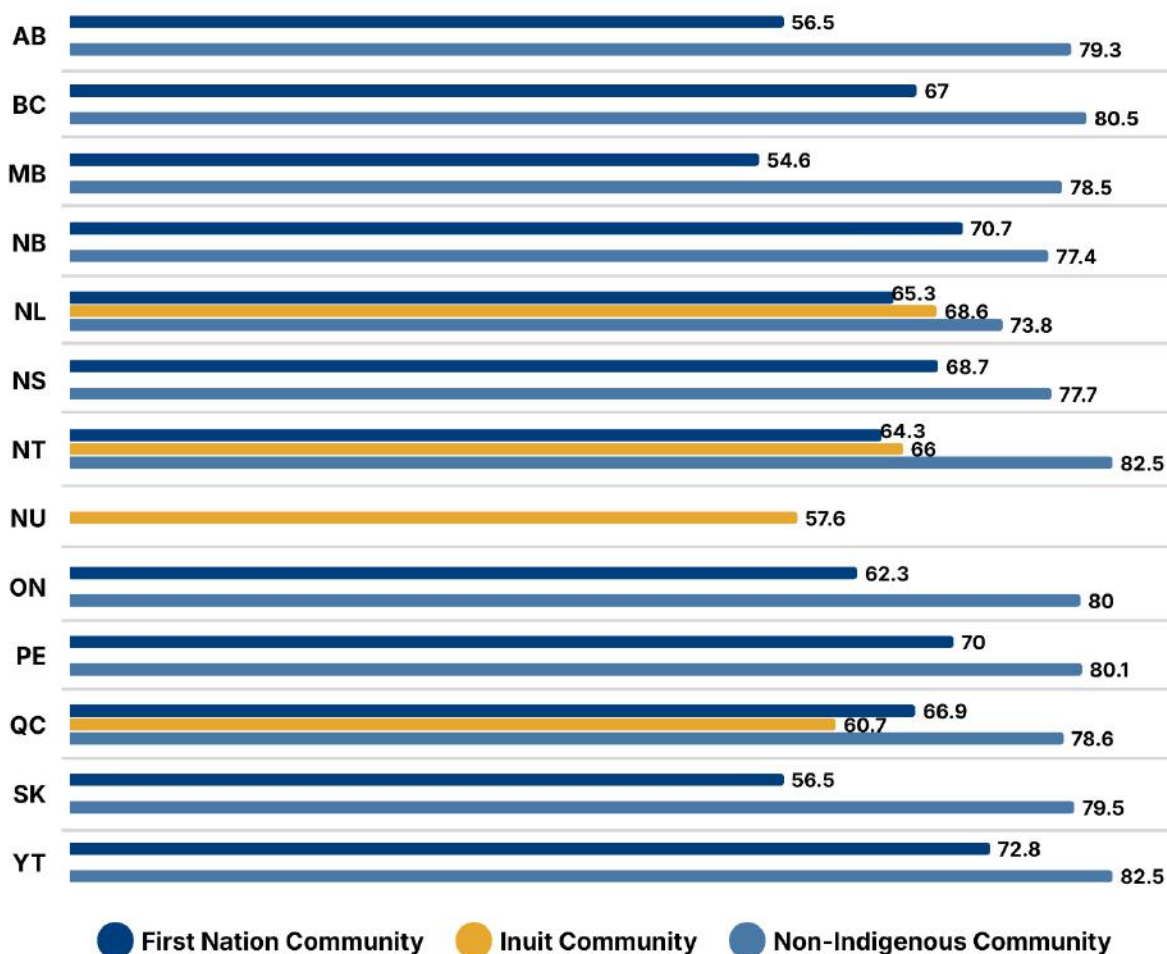
## Regional CWB Scores

Regionally, First Nations CWB average scores are lowest in the Prairies, with Manitoba First Nations Communities demonstrating gaps with non-Indigenous communities in excess of 25 points and all Prairie

provinces demonstrating CWB average scores below 53.0 (in comparison with other regional areas with values all above 60.0) (Figure 34).

**Figure 34: Community Well-Being Scores (Average) by Province or Territory and Community Type, 2021**

## Average Community Well-Being Scores by Province or Territory and Community Type, 2021



Source: Indigenous Services Canada. Custom Tabulations, Censuses of Population, 1981, 1991 to 2006, 2016, 2021 & National Household Survey, 2011.

### Summary of CWB Scores

Below is a summary of the gaps facing First Nations Communities compared with non-Indigenous populations with respect to CWB scores. For reference, figures represented in red depict the gap in CWB component and subcomponent scores, and the arrows reflect the direction that the gap is moving. For example, a red upward arrow would indicate that the gap is increasing in relation to scores of non-Indigenous communities, whereas a downward red arrow would indicate that the gap is narrowing.

**Figure 35: 2021 Gap in CWB Scores between First Nations and Non-Indigenous Communities**

CWB components & subcomponents	2021 gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous communities	Score changes in First Nations communities		Gap changes between First Nations and non-Indigenous communities	
	(A)				
		1981-2021	2016-2021	1981-2021	2016-2021
		(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)
Education	15.6	28.3 ↑	2.2 ↑	1.3 ↑	0.2 ↑
Labour force activity	14.2	2.6 ↑	0.9 ↑	1.2 ↑	0.7 ↓
Income	15.2	27.3 ↑	8.9 ↑	7.7 ↓	6.9 ↓
Housing	20.4	11.4 ↑	3.9 ↑	7.7 ↓	3.6 ↓

Source: Indigenous Services Canada. Custom Tabulations, Censuses of Population, 1981, 1991 to 2006, 2016, 2021 & National Household Survey, 2011.

In comparison, below is a table that depicts the gaps faced between Inuit communities and non-Indigenous communities related to CWB subcomponents.

CWB components & subcomponents	2021 gap between Inuit and non-Indigenous communities (A)	Score changes in Inuit communities		Gap changes between Inuit and non-Indigenous communities	
		1981-2021 (B)	2016-2021 (C)	1981-2021 (D)	2016-2021 (E)
Education	25.8	16.3 ↑	3.3 ↓	13.3 ↑	5.7 ↑
Labour force activity	10.6	0.1 ↑	1.9 ↓	3.7 ↑	2.1 ↑
Income	7.3	30.3 ↑	2.5 ↑	10.7 ↓	0.5 ↓
Housing	28.7	11.4 ↑	0	7.7 ↓	0.3 ↑

**Figure 36: 2021 gap in CWB scores between Inuit and non-Indigenous communities**

Source: Indigenous Services Canada. Custom Tabulations, Censuses of Population, 1981, 1991 to 2006, 2016, 2021 & National Household Survey, 2011.

## Gaps in Community Well-Being Data

It is widely accepted that additional analysis is required in order to be able to understand the most recent CWB findings including the trends over time. For example, the reasoning behind why overall scores for First Nations increased but decreased for Inuit remains unknown. As well, the effects of COVID-19, including the pandemic restrictions as well as pandemic related government transfers would be highly beneficial to explore. In addition, the recent increase in the education gap for Inuit communities may be the result of the departure of highly skilled and educated workers from Inuit communities. The remoteness of Inuit communities may have made them particularly susceptible to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown conditions.

The Census of 2026 will be crucial in understanding the improvement of socio-economic well-being in Indigenous communities and will allow an assessment of whether some impacts were due to the temporary effects of the pandemic.

In addition, not all Indigenous communities are represented in this data set. For example, if a community had fewer than 65 people, as measured through the 2021 Census, it was not included. Low population

communities also do not meet confidentiality disclosure rules and, therefore, their subcomponent scores are not reflected.

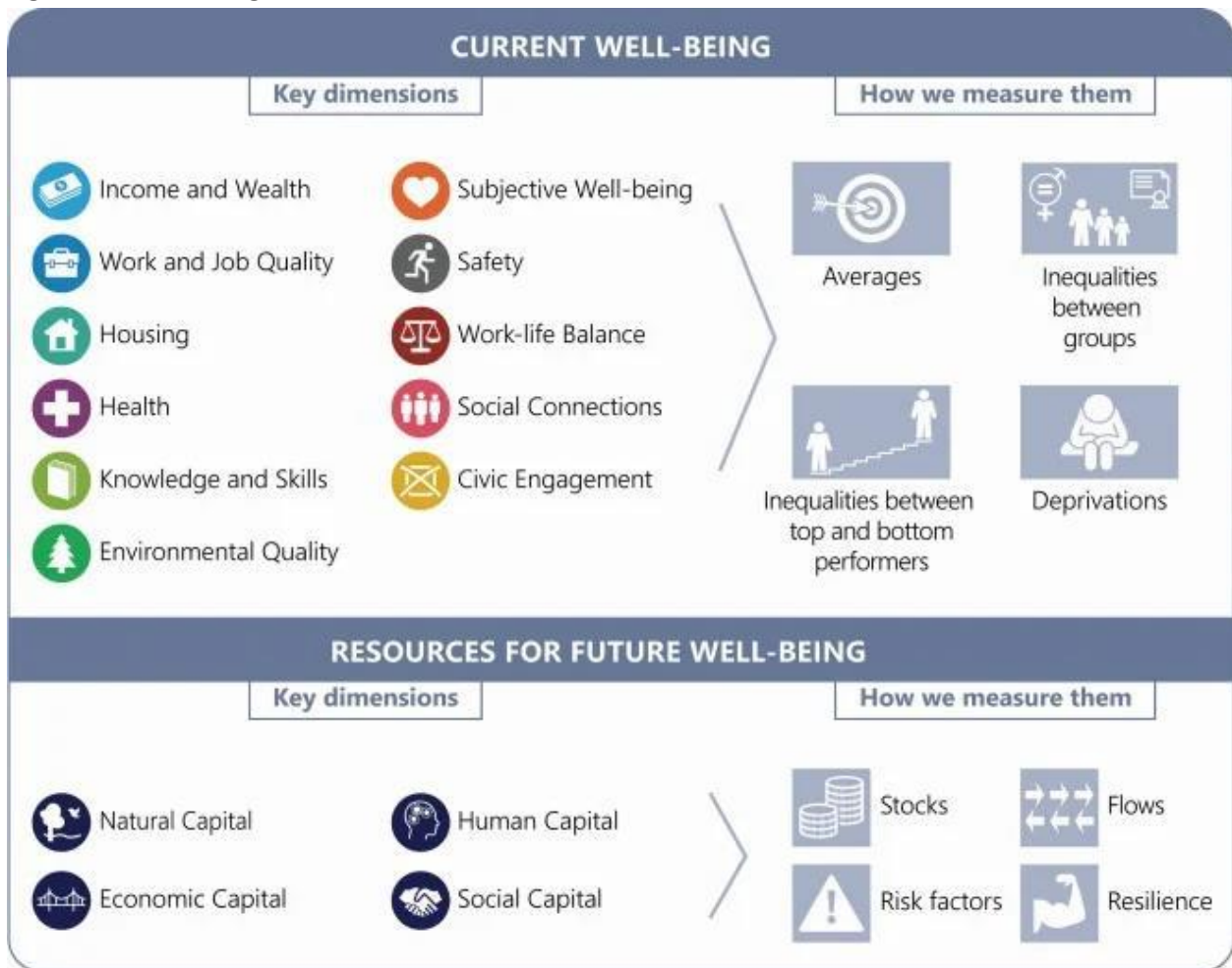
In the spring of 2018, The Office of the Auditor General of Canada (OAG) issued a report examining socio-economic gaps on First Nation reserves. The report outlined data shortcomings needing to be addressed to measure progress and the CWB Index in particular was identified as not being sufficiently comprehensive as it focuses primarily on economic indicators. The CWB was found to have omitted several aspects of well-being that are important to First Nations, namely health, environment, language, social connection, and connections to place and culture. Further, the OAG report found that the CWB did not adequately utilize the large amounts of data provided by First Nations and did not meaningfully engage with First Nations to measure and report on whether lives were improving.<sup>37</sup> The Department has committed to addressing all of the report recommendations through working with Indigenous organizations to co-develop a broad dashboard of well-being outcomes to reflect mutually agreed upon metrics. The NIEDB looks forward to these improvements in measuring outcomes of community well-being.

The OECD claims that for a society to progress, improvements in the well-being of its people and households must be experienced. Assessing such progress requires looking not only at the functioning of the economy but also at the diverse and unique experiences and living conditions of people. In response to this, the OECD developed the “Framework for Measuring Well-Being and Progress” which is based on the recommendations made in 2009 by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress and other initiatives in this field. The Framework is built around three distinct components: current well-being, inequalities in well-being outcomes, and resources for future well-being. The framework aims to examine economic and social situations measured through averages, inequalities, deprivations, and inequalities between top and bottom performers. It also looks to measure risk factors, resilience, and flows of key dimensions for future well-being.

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<sup>37</sup> The Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2018). *Report 5 - Socio-economic Gaps on First Nations Reserves-Indigenous Services Canada*.

**Figure 37: Well-being Framework**



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (N/A). A framework for improving current and future well-being.

ISC has been working to improve measures of well-being and adding additional lenses to provide a more fulsome picture of well-being in Indigenous communities. One such element is the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) which considers additional factors of well-being, including being knowledgeable, having a decent standard of living, and living a long and healthy life.

ISC also reports on additional components of well-being, such as language use and justice, and highlights gaps in these components in the department's *Annual Report to Parliament*.

## Conclusion

In summary, the CWB provides valuable insights into existing trends and gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. While the results may be slightly skewed due to the varying degree to which one defines well-being, it remains a useful tool for analyzing improvements and disparities between communities in Canada. This chapter also highlights the importance of integrating various definitions and frameworks that define well-being into one's analysis to take into account the diverse and unique experiences of people. Aspects such as health, language, the environment, and culture are aspects that



are being reviewed currently by the NIEDB, ISC, as well as Indigenous partners with the hopes of co-developing a broad dashboard of well-being outcomes to reflect mutually agreed upon metrics. It is imperative that Indigenous communities are engaged in the development of more comprehensive metrics in this regard to ensure that diverse lived experiences are considered and that international perspectives are also considered.

For future reports, it will be highly useful to explore the impacts that individual indicators may have on the CWB (or any future, modified report). For example, the NIEDB is eager to understand the impacts of increased infrastructure investments or programming on overall CWB scores. The underlying question being whether or not increased investments in social infrastructure and infrastructure (water management systems, housing, social centers, etc.) contributes positively to overall CWB scores. It is the NIEDB's assumption that increasing social infrastructure (e.g., culturally relevant spaces and other community-based centers) will help build trust between community members and improve self-identity, thereby contributing to increased CWB scores.

Nationally, CWB scores for both First Nations and Inuit have increased significantly over the last 40 years. While assumptions may be difficult to make, this increase may be due to the Government of Canada's commitment to renewed Nation-to-Nation and Inuit-Crown relationships as well as a focus on Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. These commitments may come with increased financial resources, an increase in land transfers, Government of Canada programming and assistance – all factors which may contribute to overall and subcomponent CWB scores.

Despite these positive increases, significant gaps remain between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, indicating that there remains significant work to be done in terms of achieving equality with non-Indigenous Canadians.

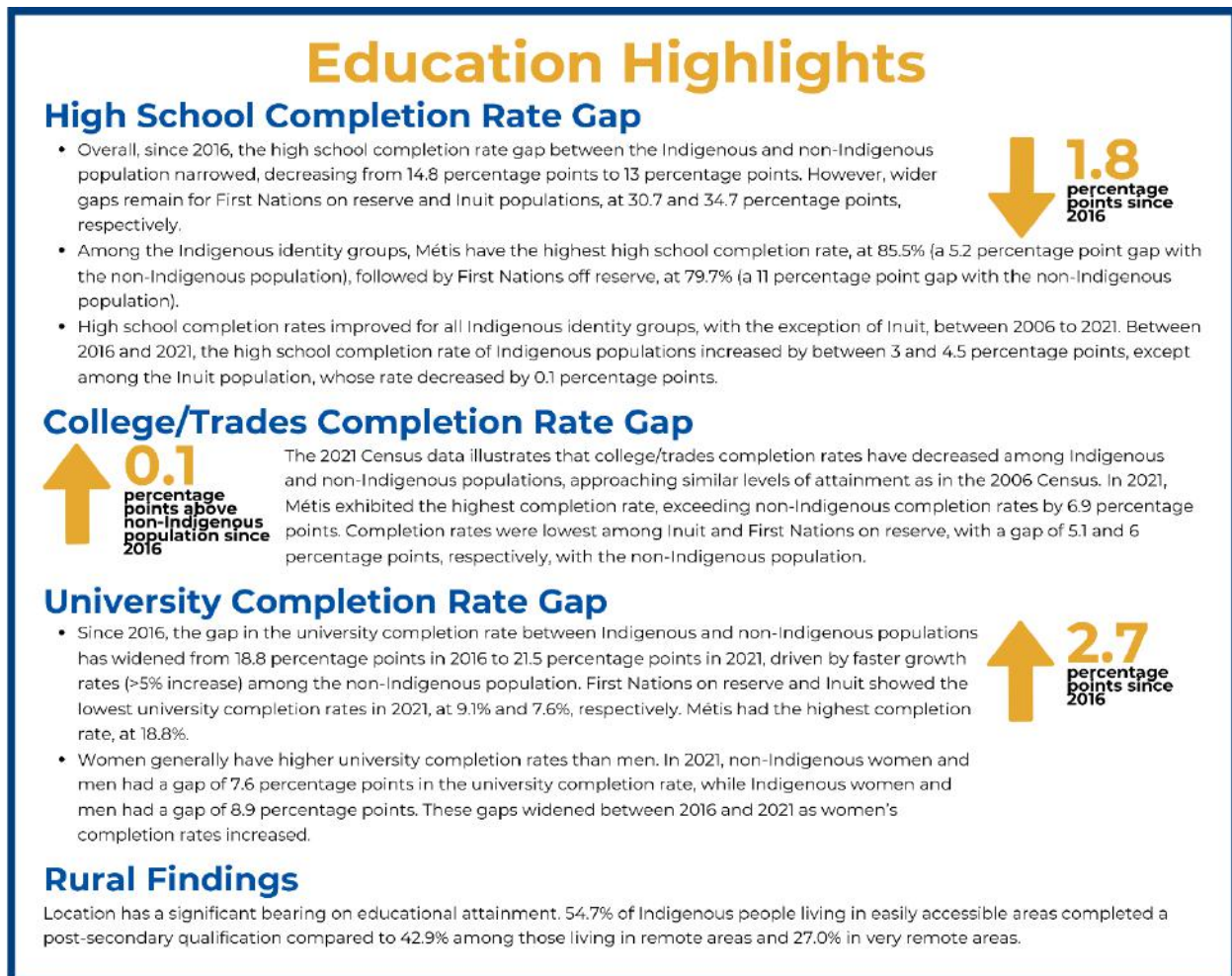
#### Recommendations:

- ***Increase funding for distinctions-based, culturally relevant spaces to build social capital and to improve sense of self-identity (e.g.: recreation centers, community-based science centers and land-based learning centers).***
- ***Expand the CWB Index to include Indigenous-specific dimensions of well-being such as health, environment, language, social connections, access to land, and cultural continuity.***
- ***Create leadership development programs to empower Indigenous youth and adults. Focus on building skills, confidence, and opportunities for community leadership and advocacy.***

## UNDERLYING INDICATOR #1: EDUCATION

*“Education, delivered through residential schools was the tool for assimilation. It was education that helped to perpetuate the situation we see today for Indigenous Peoples in Canada. We [...] believe that it will be education, again, that will be the tool that best addresses all of that, for education will create knowledge and from knowledge will come understanding. From understanding will come respect – both self-respect for Indigenous people and mutual respect for all.”*

– The Honourable Justice Senator Murray Sinclair



## Introduction

A person's level of education is an important factor in determining their employment, income, mental and physical well-being, and contributes to the overall economic development of Indigenous communities. With technological advancements and increased global competition, formal academic education is needed to acquire the necessary skills to advance economic development of Indigenous communities. As will be discussed within this chapter, there are many models of education and various paths to achieving educational certifications, diplomas, and degrees that go beyond the provincially set curricula. Due to

increased Indigenous agency and self-determination in education, there are an increasing number of Indigenous academic institutions and programs, an Indigenous school district, education agreements, and Treaty education opportunities. Such education structures incorporate Indigenous knowledge, culture, history, and language into the curriculum which, as will be discussed, is an essential component for the academic success and personal well-being of Indigenous students.

Education is also a determinant of health and well-being. Adults with a high school education are more likely to claim that they are in great general and mental health. Further, the higher the level of education attained, the more control a person feels they have over their lives.

Education in Indigenous communities is part of a difficult history of residential schools in Canada, whereby the Government of Canada established religious schools to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian society. The system was part of a policy of cultural genocide and colonization which had the goal of eliminating Indigenous rights, lands, and resources. This tragic history undoubtedly has an impact on some Indigenous perceptions and relationship with the education system in Canada.

There are multiple, interconnected potential explanations for the education gap. Canada's acts of colonialism and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples has lasting negative effects on the mental, spiritual, and physical health and well-being of Indigenous Peoples. The resulting effect of intergenerational trauma can be observed socio-economically through the core and underlying indicators within this report. Although the metrics within this chapter provide explanations for the education gap, it must be remembered that the individual and community effects of colonialism and assimilation are interconnected and cumulate within and between each indicator.

For the indicators examined in this chapter – attainment of educational diplomas, certificates, and degrees – only those aged 25 and older are examined to maintain consistency with previous reports and findings from this chapter. Data and discussion for those under age 25 is contained in the Youth chapter of this report.

### Residential Schools

Approximately 150,000 Indigenous children attended residential schools in Canada, which were designed to assimilate Indigenous youth into Canadian society. It is estimated that roughly 6,000 children died in these facilities, however the actual number is likely greater due to incomplete and yet to be released records.

In total, over 130 residential schools operated in Canada between 1831-1996.

Children attending these schools would suffer consequences that would last for generations. They were forcibly removed from their families, isolated, and stripped of their culture. Upon their arrival, their hair was cut, and traditional clothing removed and, in some cases, new names were given. These practices left students disoriented, insecure, and feeling disconnected from both Indigenous and settler society.

Many children suffered a great deal of abuse at the hands of educators in the residential school system, which undeniably caused a great deal of anger and distrust towards settlers and the settler schooling system. The legacy of the residential school system has resulted in intergenerational trauma.

## Indigenous Agency in Education

Despite the challenging relationship that many Indigenous Peoples may have with the education system, Indigenous agency in this space is at an all time high. It is important to highlight programs, initiatives, institutions, organizations, and governances that are working towards improving the statistics reported in this chapter and towards closing the gap.

Various institutes, organizations and Indigenous governments have distinctions-based mandates focused upon improving Indigenous education. It can be important to consider a distinctions-based lens when focusing on Indigenous education given the variation in educational attainment rates across identity groups, as reported in this chapter. The varying and specific needs, circumstances, barriers, cultures, histories, and languages must be reflected in the education programs and policies established. For example, Rupertsland Institute (RI) Métis Center of Excellence is an affiliate of the Métis Nation of Alberta with a mandate in education, research and training. RI's education mandate covers kindergarten, primary, secondary, post-secondary and adult-learning with the goal to enhance Métis education self-determination, support and improve educational outcomes for Métis citizens, and expand the offering of and access to financial support available for Métis students.<sup>38</sup>

Education agreements give participating First Nations jurisdictional control over on-reserve education, allowing for the Indigenous culture, language and heritage to be emphasized in the curriculum. This control is important for advancing self-determination and stepping out from under the *Indian Act*:

- Under *An Agreement with Respect to Education in Nova Scotia* (1997), 12 Nova Scotia First Nations have jurisdictional control over the primary, elementary, and secondary education on reserve and management responsibilities for the Department's post-secondary education programs.<sup>39</sup>
- The *Anishinabek Nation Education Agreement* (2017) gives 23 Anishinabek First Nations in Ontario jurisdictional control over on-reserve education for junior kindergarten to grade 12.<sup>40</sup>
- The *Regional Education Agreement* (2021) between ISC and the Elsipogtog First Nation Education Authority gives Elsipogtog First Nation its own self-established education structure focused on better supporting cultural connections and diversity, responding to the unique needs of First Nation students and promoting success.<sup>41</sup>

### Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey

Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) serves 12 of the 13 Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia participating under the *An Agreement with Respect to Education in Nova Scotia* (1997). With a unified team comprised of chiefs, staff, parents and educators, MK has a primary mission to actively promote excellence in Mi'kmaq education, interests and rights for the communities and to facilitate the development of lifelong learning. MK works on this mission by offering many programs, services and supports such as:

- **Atlantic First Nation Tech Services (AFNTS):** provides technology-related resources and excellence in service for the MK and Atlantic Canada First Nation schools and health centers.

<sup>38</sup> Ruperstland Institute. (2024). *Education*.

<sup>39</sup> Government of Canada. (2014, June 20). *Agreement with Respect to Mi'kmaq Education in Nova Scotia*.

<sup>40</sup> Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2017, August 16). *Canada and the Anishinabek Nation Celebrate the Signing of Historic Education Self-Government Agreement*. Government of Canada.

<sup>41</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. (2021, March 9). *Government of Canada signs Regional Education Agreement with Elsipogtog First Nation Education Authority*. Government of Canada.

- **Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH):** a program that enables students to begin their college and professional lives more quickly and with more support than the typical school-to-work pathway.
- **Indigenous Languages Component:** a Canadian Heritage funding program administered by MK for Nova Scotia applicants with the goal to support community-based projects strengthening the Indigenous cultural identity, and the preservation and revitalization of the Mi'kmaw language.
- **Red Road Project:** aims to educate First Nation youth about the dangers of using illegal substances.
- Creation of many Mi'kmaw education mobile applications, such as the language app called "L'nui'suti".
- Mentor Apprentice and Junior Mentor Apprentice programs.
- Emerging immersion classes in some MK schools.
- Online and in-person language Mi'kmaw language classes to communities without many fluent speakers.
- Releasing resource documents.

The success of MK and Indigenous control over education is observed through astonishing statistics. In Nova Scotia, the high school graduation rates of First Nation students is 95%. This is above the overall Indigenous high school completion rate of 77.7% across Canada in The succes2021. This success is attributed to Indigenous-controlled education as 83% of First Nation students in Nova Scotia are educated in MK schools, with an attendance rate of 91%. The success of Indigenous-controlled education goes beyond high school completion as 600 First Nation students in Nova Scotia recently were enrolled in post-secondary institutions.<sup>42</sup>

Aside from education agreements, Indigenous culture, language, and history is emphasized in schools in various other ways:

- In 2008, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, the Ministry of Education, and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations committed to making treaty education for kindergarten to grade 12 mandatory. Treaty education is taught through two resources: the Kindergarten to Grade 6 Teaching Treaties in the Classroom, and Treaty Essential Learnings.<sup>43</sup>
- In 2015, a memorandum was signed between the Province of Nova Scotia and the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, creating the Treaty Education Nova Scotia partnership. The memorandum commits to increasing treaty education awareness and understanding in all Mi'kmaq and provincial schools, the public service, and the general public through a public campaign called "We are all Treaty People."<sup>44</sup>
- Formed in 2017, the Kee Tas Kee Now Council Education Authority was formed by 5 First Nations that are home to 6 schools, creating an Indigenous-led school district for First Nation schools. The 6 schools implement land-based learning curriculum teaching the Cree culture, finding and harvesting medicinal plants and survival skills. The first school year with the new district saw an increase in attendance and graduation rates in the schools.<sup>45</sup>

Similar initiatives have been made at the post-secondary level. Trent University has implemented wise practices for offering mandatory Indigenous courses as part of their commitment to reconciliation and

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<sup>42</sup> Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey. (2021).

<sup>43</sup> Saskatchewan. (2008, September 15). *Moving Forward with Mandatory Treaty Education*.

<sup>44</sup> Nova Scotia Public School Program. (N/A). *Treaty Education*.

<sup>45</sup> Muzyka, Kyle. (2018, June 18). *How 5 Alberta First Nations are helping shape the future of Indigenous education in Canada*. CBC News.

promoting Indigenous knowledge, culture, and history. These courses are designed to provide students with a deeper understanding of Indigenous perspectives and experiences. Examples of these courses include Indigenous Education in Canada, Foundations in Indigenous Environmental Studies, and Foundations of Modern Indigenous Life, to name a few. These mandatory courses offer several important benefits such as:

- cultural awareness and understanding;
- reconciliation and decolonization;
- community engagement and relationships; and,
- legal and ethical responsibilities.

These benefits extend beyond the classroom by contributing to a more inclusive, informed, and compassionate society.

Another example of a vital initiative that elevates Indigenous perspectives and values is the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE). The NCCIE is uniquely Indigenous and emphasizes Indigenous viewpoints in education. The NCCIE is based at the First Nations University of Canada and serves as an important platform for sharing stories and promoting Indigenous education in Canada and globally. Through its commitment to collaboration, cultural respect, and educational excellence, the NCCIE plays a crucial role in advancing Indigenous education and fostering understanding among all Canadians.

The Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), established in 1999 by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, also plays a crucial role in supporting First Nations education in 55 schools in Manitoba. The MFNERC offers comprehensive services, including education, administration, technology, and language and culture support.

The MFNERC's commitment to Indigenous education, cultural preservation, and community collaboration contributes significantly to the well-being and success of First Nation students in Manitoba.

In addition, in October 2018, the Government of the Northwest Territories made a commitment to transform Aurora College into a polytechnic university and is set to formally launch in 2025. The goal is to create an effective, efficient, and sustainable polytechnic university. Recognizing that the majority of students at the polytechnic university will be Indigenous (as is currently the case with Aurora College), efforts are being made to create a culturally meaningful environment where Indigenous students can thrive. The transformed institution will be more accessible and attract a greater number of students from within the Northwest Territories and beyond.

Aurora College's transformation into a polytechnic university represents a significant step toward enhancing education, fostering Indigenous success, and contributing to the economic growth of the Northwest Territories.

Lastly, Yukon University, formerly known as Yukon College, is a public university located in the Canadian territory of Yukon with a main campus in Whitehorse and 12 smaller campuses across the territory, including in various Yukon Indigenous communities. The university offers numerous resources, initiatives,

supports and courses based on Indigenous traditional knowledge and ways of knowing, being and doing with the goal of decolonizing education.<sup>46</sup>

Please refer to Appendix C for a list of more Indigenous post-secondary academic programs and the benefits of such programs.

## Positive and Long-term Effects

Indigenous control over education is an act of resilience against colonialism and the use of education to erase and indoctrinate Indigenous Peoples, such as through the residential school system. Indigenous-led education is essential for revitalizing the language, culture, identity, and sense of belonging that has been lost for many Indigenous Peoples due to assimilation and marginalization by Canada. As stated by the Honorable Justice Senator Murray Sinclair, “Education is what got us into this mess, and education is key to getting us out of it.”

Curriculum that prioritizes teaching Indigenous culture, language, and history and fosters a culturally safe environment with culturally competent teachers who emphasize the value of Indigenous knowledge can positively affect the trajectory of a student’s life.

Through interviews with Elders, Knowledge Holders, and representatives from Indigenous-led and established learning centers, Lateisha Ugwuegbula identified and reported the following positive effects on the spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, and social well-being of youth from traditional education:

- Allows students to be knowledgeable of and connected to their history, ancestry, and culture, which can have a major positive effect on education achievement, motivation, and success.
- Fosters positive identity formation, confidence, self-perception, and mental health.
- Contributes to positive identity formation, self-esteem, community well-being, and cultural continuity through traditional language learning.
- Allows students to feel that they are understood and heard, which improves mental health and well-being and provides healing.
- Fosters a sense of belonging, social connection and community through which students feel that they are valued and have the ability to positively contribute to their communities and society.<sup>47</sup>

## Indigenous High School Completion

Living without a high school diploma can be a significant obstacle to employment and one’s future. Lower high school completion rates are strongly correlated with poorer economic outcomes, including higher unemployment rates and lower income levels. In turn, this has negative impacts on both the individual and community-level economic development potential of communities or regions.

The lack of culturally aligned high school education systems has negative effects on Indigenous students’ success and subsequent pursuit of post-secondary education. Nunavut has an agreement with Alberta

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<sup>46</sup> Yukon University. (2024). *Our History*.

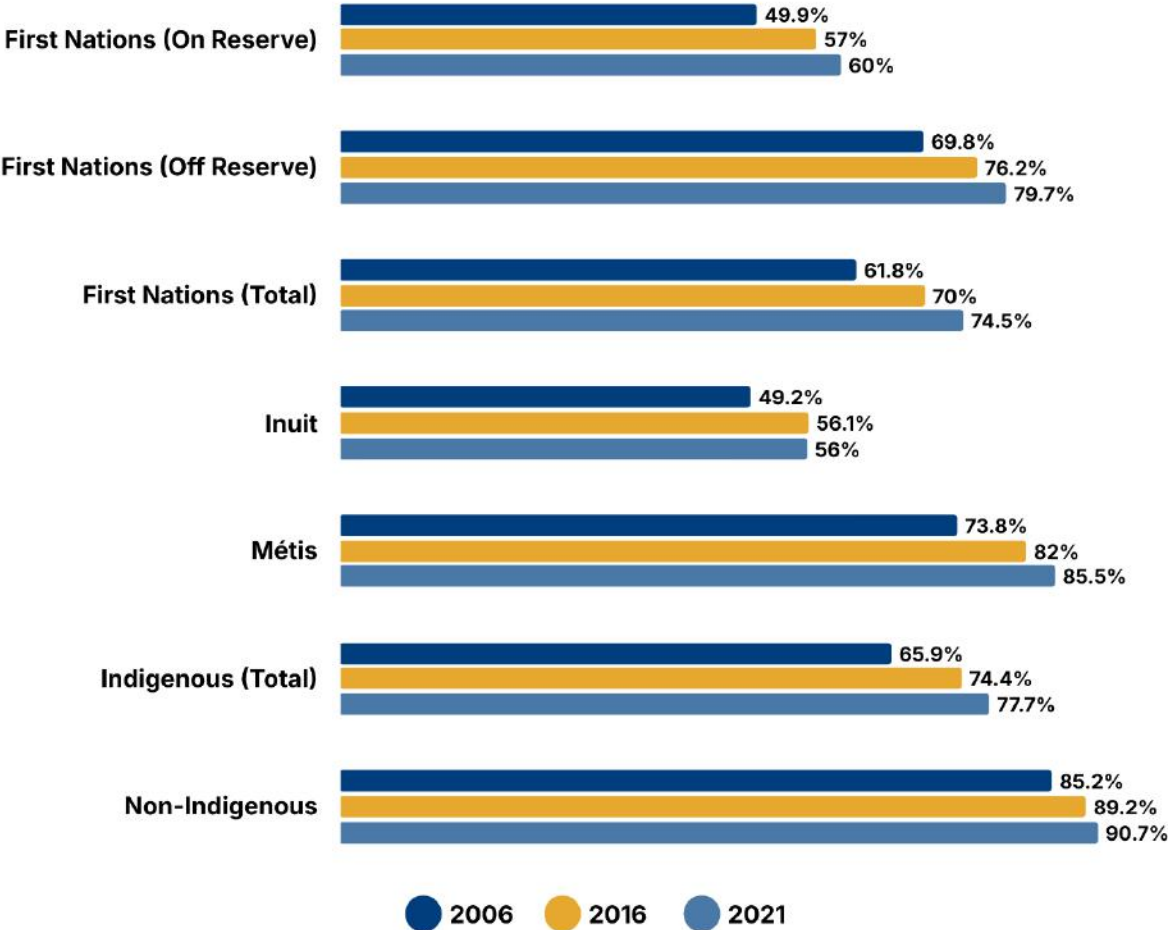
<sup>47</sup> Ugwuegbula, L. (2020). *Reclaiming education: Indigenous control of Indigenous education*. Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness.

that it will utilize Alberta's education system for its schooling, with the goal of giving graduates from Nunavut a variety of options and opportunities for post-secondary as it has provided for Alberta students. However, through the utilization of Alberta's education system, Inuit students of Nunavut must navigate a colonial system that does not place importance on Inuit cultural classes and excludes the use of Inuktitut, creating a language barrier for Inuit students who are not fluent in English and/or French. This exclusion from academia leads Inuit students to feel culturally disconnected, resulting in the low Inuit graduation rates in Nunavut and a lack of confidence to continue to post-secondary. In 2016, only 48% of people aged 25-64 in Nunavut had a high school diploma or equivalency in comparison to the Canadian average of 86%. Nunavut provides an example that is the reality for Indigenous students across Canada. Indigenous languages, histories and cultures must be equally prioritized in the education system to foster inclusion and cultural connection to ensure the success of Indigenous students and confidence to pursue post-secondary.<sup>48</sup>



Figure 38: Percent of Population with at least a High School Diploma (25 to 64 years) by Identity Group, 2006 and 2016, 2021, Canada

## Percent of Population with at least a High School Diploma (25 to 64 Years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and 2021 Census

- High school completion rates improved for all Indigenous identity groups, with the exception of Inuit, between 2006 to 2021.
- Among the Indigenous identity groups, Métis have the highest high school completion rate followed by First Nations off reserve. First Nations on reserve and Inuit continue to have high school completion rates that are greater than 30 percentage points lower than non-Indigenous rates.

Despite these challenges, since 2016, high school completion rates have increased nation-wide, with some significant advancements made within Indigenous populations towards closing the gap with the non-Indigenous population. Between 2016 and 2021, Indigenous populations saw an increase in high school completion rates between 3.0 and 4.5 percentage points, with the exception of Inuit, demonstrating a slight decrease of 0.1 percentage points. During the same time period, the non-Indigenous population's

high school completion rate increased by 1.5 percentage points, therefore narrowing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous completion rates. In 2016, the overall gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population was 14.8 percentage points and has decreased to 13 in 2021. However, persistent gaps still remain, in particular between First Nations on reserve and Inuit, with 30.7 and 34.7 percentage point gaps, respectively (Figure 38). There are many factors that may influence the statistics that have been presented in this section, and the depth and complexity of the issues faced by Indigenous Peoples with regard to the education system will be further explored below.

#### Gender-Specific Data on High School Completion Rates

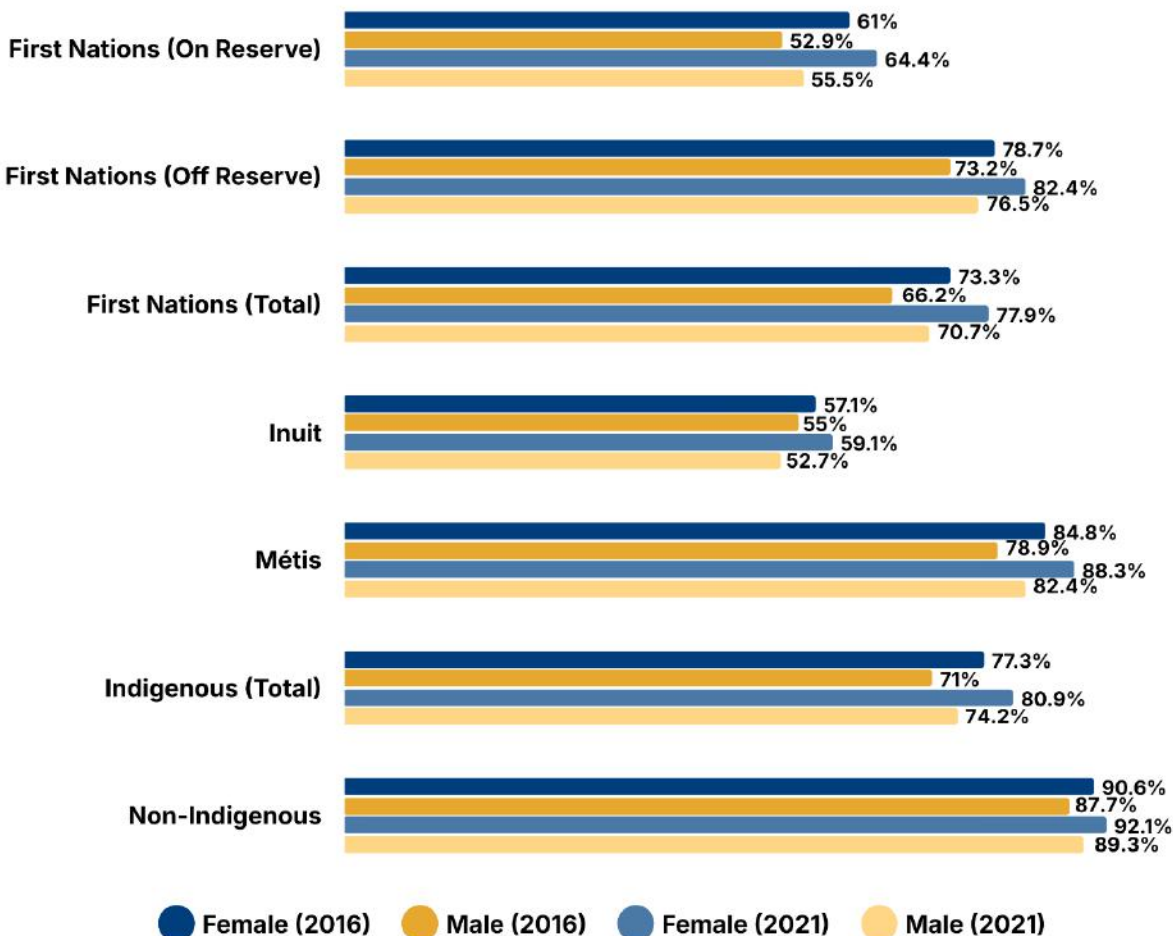
Between 2016 and 2021, high school completion rates increased across all population categories, except among Inuit men; however, the increase in completion rates was higher for the Indigenous population than for the non-Indigenous population, resulting in a closing of the gap by 1.8 percentage points. High school completion rates have consistently been higher for women than men across population groups, but the gender gap in completion rates between Indigenous men and women is higher than that between non-Indigenous men and women. In 2021, 92.1% of non-Indigenous women had completed high school, compared to 89.3% of non-Indigenous men, a gap of 2.8 percentage points. This gap is consistent with that of 2016, which was 2.9 percentage points. In comparison, 80.9% of Indigenous women and 74.2% of Indigenous men had completed high school, a gap of 6.7 percentage points, which is over double that of the non-Indigenous population and consistent with the 6.3 percentage point gap in 2016.

The gender gap in high school completion rates among Métis (5.9 percentage points) and Inuit (6.4 percentage points) populations is similar to that of the overall Indigenous population (6.7 percentage points). The gap is largest among First Nations on reserve, at 8.5 percentage points, a slight increase from 8.1 percentage points in 2016. The smallest gender gap exists among Métis and First Nations off-reserve populations, at 5.9 percentage points. The gender gap among Inuit has approximately tripled since 2016, from 2.1 percentage points in 2016 to 6.4 percentage points in 2021, which is due to the decrease in completion rates among Inuit men (Figure 39).

High school completion rates increased at approximately the same rate for men and women between 2016 and 2021. However, Inuit men's completion rates decreased by 2.3 percentage points between 2016 and 2021, from 55.0% to 52.7%. Another exception was found within First Nation populations on reserve, where completion rates for women increased more than those of men, as was the case between 2006 and 2016. Among First Nation women on reserve, completion rates increased from 61.0% to 64.4%, an increase of 3.4 percentage points, compared to a 2.6 percentage point increase, from 52.9% to 55.5%, for First Nation men on reserve.

Figure 39: Percent of Population with at least a High School Diploma (25 to 64 years) Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Percent of Population with at least a High School Diploma (25 to 64 Years) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and 2021 Census

- High school completion rates are higher for women than men, and this gender gap is larger among Indigenous populations.
- Between 2016 and 2021, high school completion rates increased for all identity groups, except among Inuit men, and the non-Indigenous population. Within groups, completion rates increased for men and women at approximately the same rate. An exception to this trend was found within First Nations on reserve, wherein the completion rates of women increased more than those of their male counterparts.

## Post-secondary Qualification in 2021

Statistics Canada released a study in late 2021 which indicated that, according to their definition of Indigenous<sup>49</sup>, just under half (49.2%) of Indigenous Peoples aged 25 to 64 years had completed a postsecondary qualification according to the 2021 Census. It was most common for these individuals to have completed college, CEGEP, or other non-university certificate or diploma. Completion rates were highest amongst Métis and lowest among Inuit at only 33.6%, and again rates were below those recorded for the non-Indigenous population, which were 68.0%.<sup>50</sup>

The *NIES* from 2022 estimated that if access to education and training for Indigenous Peoples became equitable to non-Indigenous peoples, the result would be an additional **\$8.5 billion** in income earned annually by the Indigenous population.

In 2018, the NIEDB released an updated report, stating that “in order to have access to as many opportunities as possible, more partnerships between the federal government and academic institutions are needed. This will ensure that First Nation youth can access higher education without leaving their community or relocating.”

## Indigenous College/Trades Completion

While high school completion is the minimum education requirement for most employment opportunities, successfully completing post-secondary education allows individuals to develop specialized vocational skills. Census data from 2021 shows college or trade degree completion has reduced in all identity groups amongst the working age population, approaching similar levels of attainment as in the 2006 Census. According to research, community college enrolment was at its peak in 2012-13, but by 2020-21, numbers were already down by over 10%. It is likely that the pandemic played a role in reversing that trend.<sup>51</sup> One potential explanation for the reduction in college/trades enrollment is that during the relative economic boom of the 2010s, it was easier to obtain and retain employment, reducing the perceived need to seek out additional vocational training. As people cannot lose accreditation, a decline in the proportion of those with completed college/trades could only be explained by more individuals leaving the top end of this age group (turning 65 years old) than those 25 years and older acquiring the qualifications.

### Reform 94

Vocational education has often been viewed as secondary to academic education. In Norway, beginning in the fall of 1994, a nationwide reform to high school vocational programs integrated more general education, implemented a supplementary semester of academic courses, and improved access to apprenticeships. The goal of this reform was to better prepare students for college and improve the quality of the vocational route of education. The results show an increase in initial enrollment into vocational programs and increased social mobility.

The reform resulted in more men completing the vocational program at the expense of academic diplomas than women. Women’s completion was more likely to be complimentary to a general academic high school diploma. Men’s completion did not show a detectable impact on college completion rates but did show an increase in labour

<sup>49</sup> Statistics Canada defines ‘Indigenous’ as individuals who identify themselves as First Nation, Métis or Inuit.

<sup>50</sup> Statistics Canada. (2023, October 17). Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes of Indigenous peoples, 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Usher, A. (2022, October 12). *The Global Collapse in “College” Enrolments*. Higher Education Strategy Associates.

market earnings and a decrease in involvement in the criminal justice system, especially for disadvantaged men. For disadvantaged women, the reform lowered the high school dropout rate but did not impact the college completion rates or increase labour market earnings. The difference in labour market earnings between men and women in this study demonstrates the gender segregation that exists across vocational fields with men concentrating more in higher-paying skilled trade jobs and women concentrating almost exclusively in lower-paying service-sector jobs.

The differing results in college completion and labour market earnings between men and women in the reform suggests that further supports are needed in the transition from high school vocational programs to college. For instance, increased support in college application processes and throughout college programs to encourage completion. Additionally, efforts are needed to make the stereotypical male vocational fields more appealing to women in attempt to close the gender pay gap.<sup>52</sup>

There is some evidence that the specialized education that college provides is finding new appeal. Statistics Canada found that while college or trades completion in the past might have been understood to be an intermediate or alternative educational pathway to a bachelor's degree, trends now indicate that college programs are also complementary or supplemental to degrees, with an average of 20% of college students having previously completed a bachelor's degree or higher (this number rises to more than 33% among international students).<sup>53</sup> With the relatively short 1–2-year length of many college programs, pandemic disruptions to education would have been expected to have had significant negative impacts on student's cohorts enrolled between March 2020 through to the May 2021 Census date, and their corresponding completion rates (Figure 40).

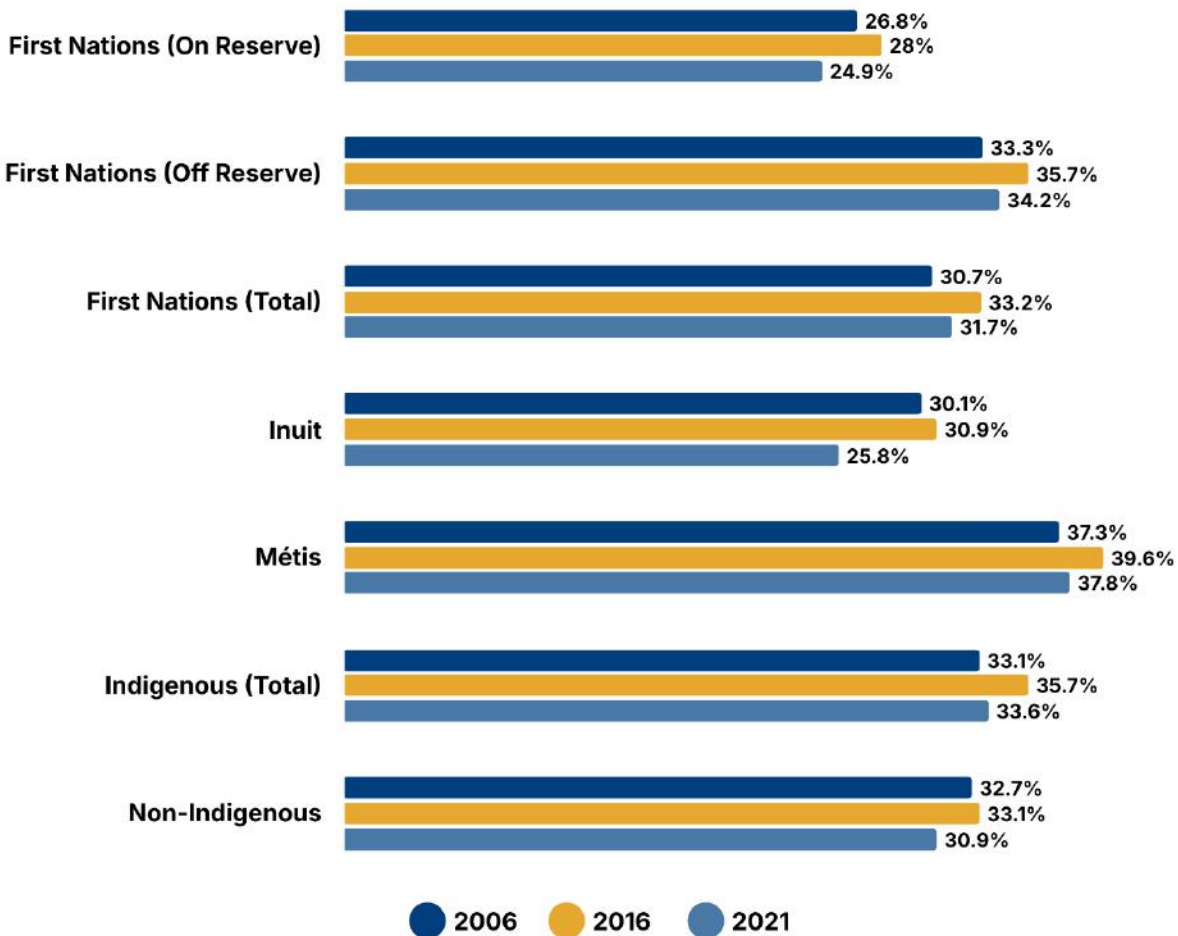
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<sup>52</sup> Bertrand, M., Mogstad, M., & Mountjoy, J. (2019). *Improving Educational Pathways to Social Mobility: Evidence from Norway's "Reform 94"*. National Bureau of Economic Research.

<sup>53</sup> Statistics Canada. (2022, November 30). *Going to college after finishing a degree*.

Figure 40: Percent of Population with a College, Trades/Apprenticeship or Other Non-University Certificate, Diploma or Degree (25-64 years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Percent of Population with a College, Trades/Apprenticeship or Other Non-University Certificate, Diploma or Degree (25 to 64 Years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and 2021 Census

- College and other non-university certificate, diplomas or degree completion decreased from 2016 across all identity groups.
- Métis continue to exhibit the highest completion rates in this category – exceeding non-Indigenous completion rates by almost 7 percentage points.
- Inuit and First Nations on reserve demonstrate completion rates that are 5 to 6 percentage points below non-Indigenous rates and the lowest among all Indigenous identity groups.

### Gender-Specific Data on College/Trades Completion Rates

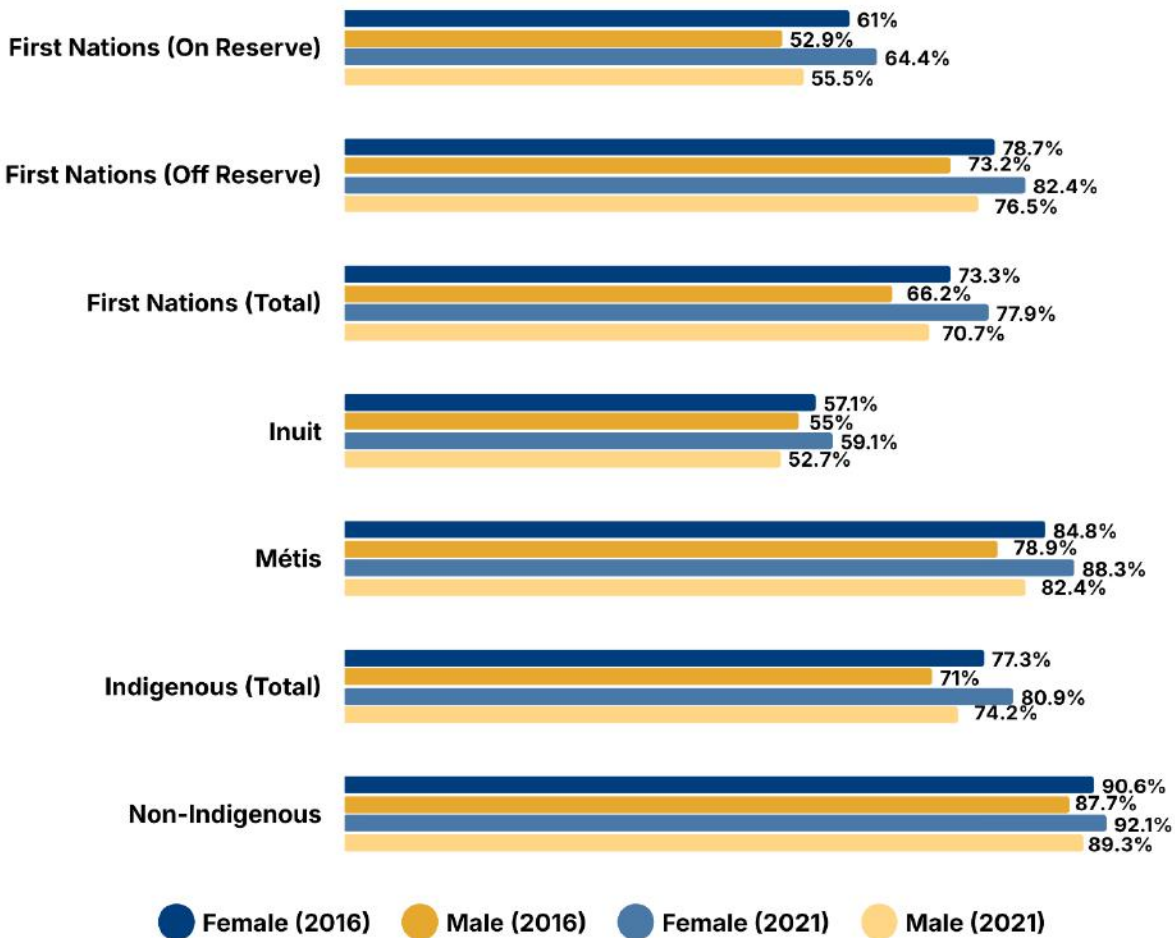
The above section illustrates that the Indigenous population had slightly higher college/trades completion rates than the non-Indigenous population, at 33.6% and 30.9%, respectively. This is in line with the finding

of the 2016 Census and the 2019 *IEPR*. While the 2016 data showed that, across all population categories, men had slightly higher completion rates than women, in 2021, First Nation off reserve women had slightly higher completion rates than men. In 2021, 33.6% of men within the overall Indigenous population had completed a college, trades/apprenticeship, or other non-university certificate, diploma, or degree, compared with 33.7% of women. The gender gap has effectively disappeared since 2016, where the completion rates were 36.1% for men and 35.3% for women. The gender gap was also narrow among the non-Indigenous population, where the completion rate among men was 31.9% versus 30.0% for women. Compared to high school completion rates, these gender gaps are much narrower (Figure 41).

Between 2016 and 2021, college/trades completion rates decreased for Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, while they increased between 2006 and 2016. The decrease in completion rates was almost identical for Indigenous populations and the non-Indigenous population (2.1 percentage points and 2.2 percentage points, respectively). Gender disaggregated data reveals that men's completion rates decreased at higher rates than women's, and that this difference was more pronounced among the Indigenous population than the non-Indigenous population. Specifically, the decrease was equal among non-Indigenous men and non-Indigenous women (2.2 percentage point decrease), whereas Indigenous men's completion rates decreased from 36.1% to 33.6% (2.5 percentage point decrease) and Indigenous women's completion rates decreased from 35.3% to 33.7% (1.6 percentage point decrease). Since 2016, the gender gap narrowed for the total Indigenous population, from 0.8 percentage points in 2016 to 0.1 percentage points in 2021. However, the gender gap increased among First Nations off reserve, and remained consistent for the Métis population. The most significant narrowing was observed among the Inuit population, decreasing from 3.7 percentage points in 2016 to 1.4 percentage points in 2021. Comparatively, the gender gap remained consistent among the non-Indigenous population at 1.9 percentage points.

Figure 41: Percent of Population with a College, Trades/Apprenticeship or Other Non-University Certificate, Diploma or Degree (25 to 64 years) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Percent of Population with a College, Trades/Apprenticeship or Other Non-University Certificate, Diploma or Degree (25 to 64 Years) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and 2021 Census

- College/trades completion rates are approximately the same for men and women within the overall Indigenous population, and slightly higher for men than women among the non-Indigenous population.
- Between 2016 and 2021, college/trades completion rates decreased more among men than women, and this trend was more pronounced among the overall Indigenous population than the non-Indigenous population.
- In 2021, Inuit had the widest gender gap in completion rates among Indigenous identity groups, but the non-Indigenous population had the largest gender gap out of all groups.



## Indigenous University Completion

The attainment of a university certificate, diploma, or degree provides a critical advantage across many current job markets. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge-based economy, many jobs facing skills shortages require a university degree, such as positions for managers and engineers in architecture, science, health, and education. Analysis from Census data found that workers in their forties with higher education earned, on average, 53% more than those without any post-secondary education (relative to high school graduates).<sup>54</sup>

2021 Census data indicates that the employment rate for Indigenous Peoples aged 25-54 was 60% for those with a high school diploma or an equivalency certificate and was 86% for those with a bachelor's degree or higher. The employment rate of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons with bachelor's degrees or higher are comparable with the highest being Métis, very closely followed by Inuit, non-Indigenous, and First Nations. Following the 2010 to 2018 cohorts of Indigenous bachelor's degree graduates, Statistics Canada reported on the quality of employment that First Nation and Métis people with bachelor's degrees experience in comparison to non-Indigenous. Two years after graduation, it was found that Métis graduates earned higher incomes compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts, whereas First Nation graduates earned around 4% less. Métis graduates were also more likely than non-Indigenous graduates to be unionized, whereas First Nations were less likely. Further, Métis graduates tended to have similar pension plan coverage rates to those of non-Indigenous graduates, whereas First Nation graduates were less covered.<sup>55</sup>

In 2021, the share of the overall Indigenous population with a university certificate, diploma, or degree rose to 15.5%, compared to 37% for the non-Indigenous population. This demonstrates an increase in the gap from 18.8 percentage points in 2016 to 21.5 percentage points in 2021, driven by faster growth rates (>5% increase) in non-Indigenous populations. The pandemic impacts on educational completion for this category are not as obvious as for the category of college, trades, and apprenticeships, with all identity groups still demonstrating improvements. Potential explanations might include a lesser pandemic impact on longer (>2 year) programs or a rate of increase that would have in fact been greater had the pandemic not affected the last year of this progress.

First Nations on reserve and Inuit demonstrated the lowest university completion rates in 2021, at 9.1% and 7.6%, respectively, and saw the smallest increases, at 0.4 and 0.9 percentage points, respectively. The Métis population had the highest university completion rate at 18.8% and also saw the largest increase of 3.0 percentage points from 2016 to 2021 among Indigenous identity groups (Figure 42).

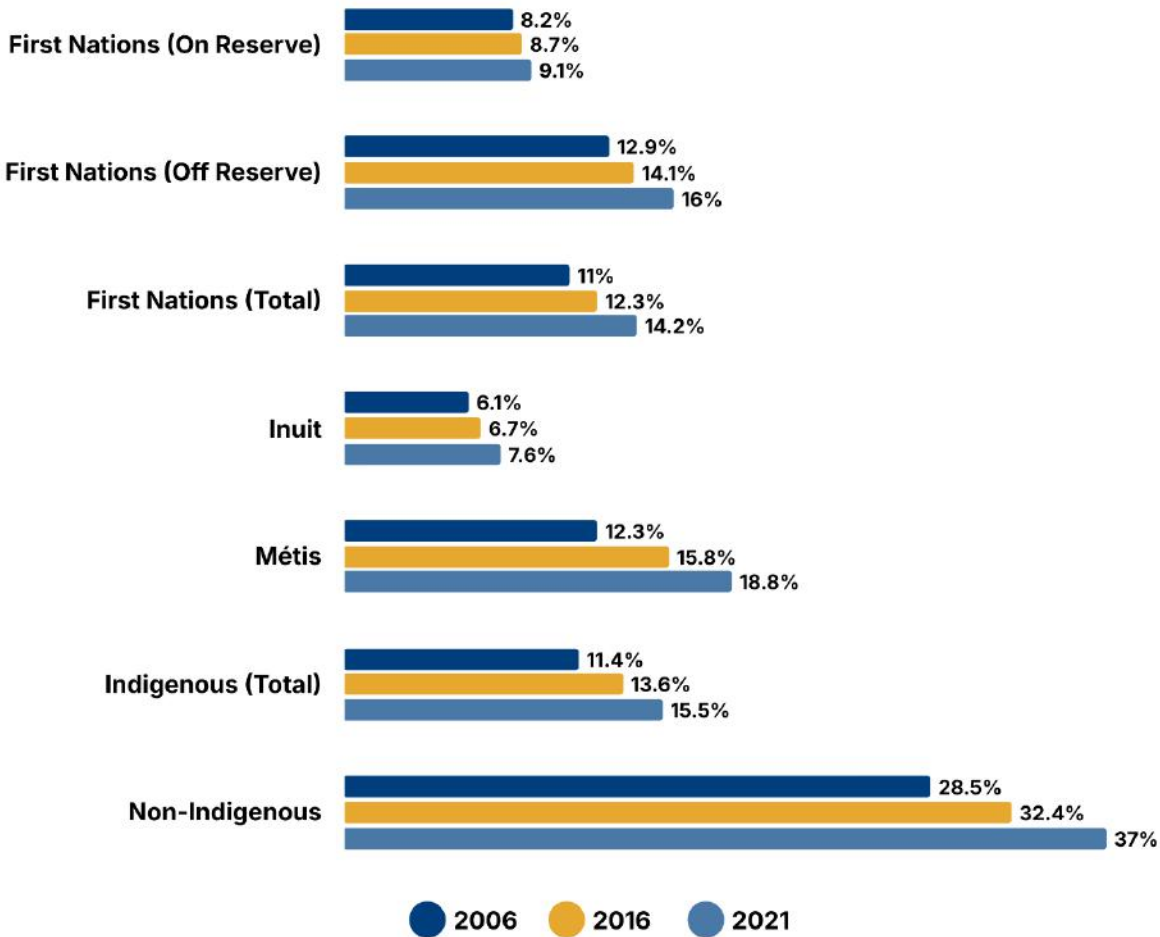
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<sup>54</sup> Statistics Canada. (2018, November 17). *Does education pay? A comparison of earnings by level of education in Canada and its provinces and territories.*

<sup>55</sup> Brunet, S., Corak, L., & Galarneau D. (2024). *Early career quality of employment of Indigenous graduates with a bachelor's degree, 2010 to 2018 cohorts.* Education, learning and training: Research Paper Series.

Figure 42: Percent of Population with a University Certificate, Diploma, or Degree (25 to 64 years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Percent of Population with a University Certificate, Diploma or Degree (25 to 64 Years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and 2021 Census

- University certificate, diploma or degree completion rates increased across all identity groups between 2016 and 2021.
- Métis continue to demonstrate the highest and fastest increasing graduation rates among Indigenous identity groups, with First Nations on reserve and Inuit demonstrating completion rates that are greater than 35 percentage points lower than non-Indigenous rates.

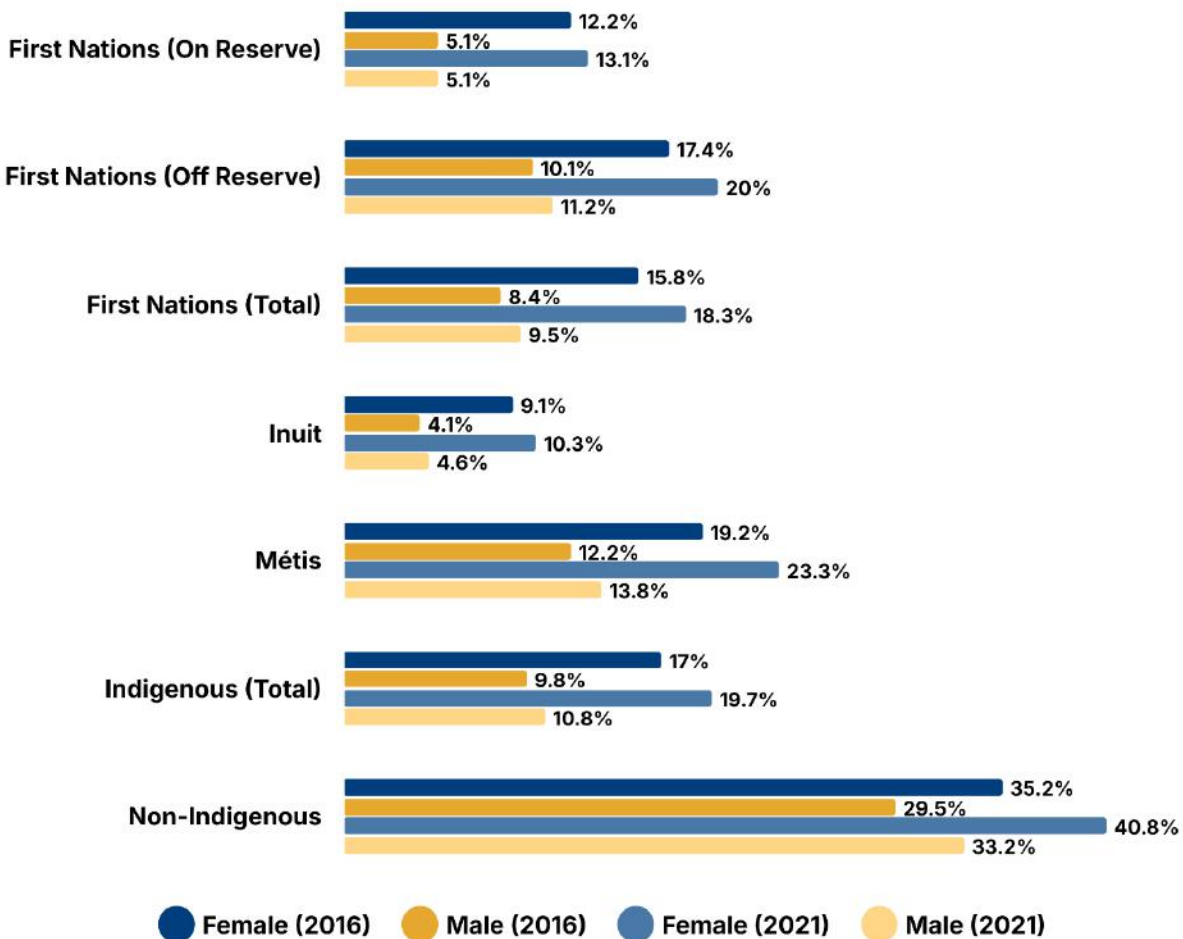
### Gender-Specific Data on University Completion Rates

Between 2016 and 2021, university completion rates increased among Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations; however, larger increases in completion rates among the non-Indigenous population widened the gap with the overall Indigenous population by 2.7 percentage points. Generally, women have higher university completion rates than men, as was the case in 2016, and this gap is more pronounced

among the overall Indigenous population than the non-Indigenous population. In 2021, the university completion rate for non-Indigenous men was 33.2%, but 40.8% for non-Indigenous women (a gap of 7.6 percentage points). In comparison, the university completion rate for men within the overall Indigenous population was 10.8%, compared with 19.7% for women (a gap of 8.9 percentage points) (Figure 43).

**Figure 43: Percent of Population with a University Certificate, Diploma or Degree (25 to 64 years) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021, Canada**

## Percent of Population with a University Certificate, Diploma or Degree (25 to 64 Years) by Identity Group and Gender, 2016 and 2021



Source: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and 2021 Census

- Women typically have higher university completion rates than men, and this gender gap is wider within Indigenous populations than within the non-Indigenous population.
- Between 2016 and 2021, university completion rates increased more for women than men.
- During this time period, university completion rates among First Nations men on reserve and Inuit men remained stagnant.

Between 2016 and 2021, women's university completion rates increased by a larger proportion than men's, which further widened the gender gap. These findings are consistent with the changes in completion rates between 2006 and 2016. Non-Indigenous women's completion rates increased more than those of women within the overall Indigenous population, widening the gap between their respective completion rates. Again, as seen between 2006 and 2016, the increase in the gender gap in completion rates was in part attributable to minimal or stagnant completion rates among men. For example, completion rates among Métis and non-Indigenous men increased by 1.6 and 3.7 percentage points, respectively. However, completion rates among First Nation men on reserve and Inuit men remained approximately the same, with First Nation on reserve men's rates remaining stagnant and Inuit men's rates increasing by 0.5 percentage points. This was also the case between 2006 and 2016, meaning that their rates have remained approximately the same for 15 years. No identity groups experienced a decrease in university completion rates.

The gap in university completion rates widened the most between non-Indigenous women and Inuit and First Nation women on reserve, by 4.7 percentage points and 4.4 percentage points, respectively. Hence, Indigenous women's completion rates increased more than those of their male counterparts, but at a lower rate than those of the non-Indigenous women population group, which is consistent with the findings observed between 2006 and 2016. Within and across all Indigenous identity groups, university completion rates are lowest among Inuit men and First Nation men on reserve, at 4.6% and 5.1%, and highest among Métis women and First Nation women off reserve, at 23.3% and 20.0%, respectively.

## Long-term Trends

Educational attainment across all levels and types of qualifications have increased since 2006. The largest increase was for the attainment of a high school diploma, or an equivalency (11.8 percentage points) followed by university qualifications (4.1 percentage points) and college/other non-university post-secondary qualifications (0.5 percentage points). The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations for the completion of high school has decreased by 6.3 percentage points. For the completion of a university certificate, diploma or degree, the gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population grew by 4.4 percentage points despite a 4.1 percent increase in Indigenous completion of a university qualification. As mentioned prior, this may be attributed to faster growth rates (>5% increase) in non-Indigenous populations. Keeping with the trend observed in 2006, the Indigenous population have an increasingly higher completion rate of college and other non-university certificates, diplomas, or degrees than the non-Indigenous population. This difference increased by 2.3 percentage points since 2006.

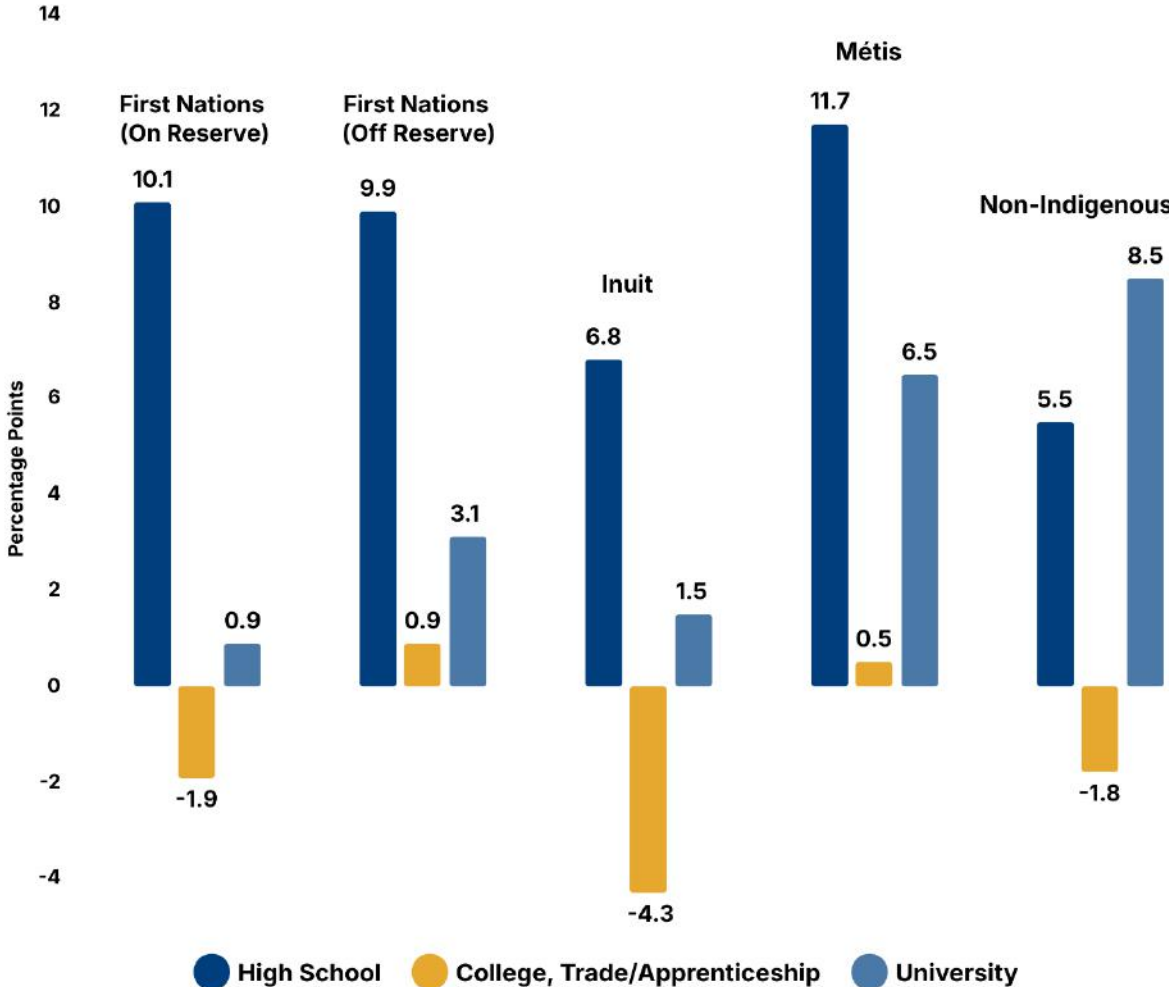
For all observed levels and types of educational attainment, Métis have had the highest attainment percentage amongst the Indigenous identity groups, a remaining trend since 2006. This may be explained by a number of factors. Firstly, Métis communities have a unique historical context stemming from the intermarriage between Indigenous Peoples and European settlers. This blend of cultures may contribute to a stronger sense of identity. Métis may also have better access to educational resources, including schools, libraries, and mentorship programs as they are often located in urban centers and these supportive environments enhance educational outcomes. Métis, along with other Indigenous groups, often have a strong connection to their distinct culture and heritage. Cultural pride and a sense of belonging can motivate educational achievement. In summary, Métis educational success results from a

combination of cultural pride, community support, and historical context. Acknowledging these factors is essential for promoting educational equity among all Indigenous groups.

It is notable that in 2006, First Nations off reserve had the highest percent attainment of a university qualification, followed by Métis (0.6 percentage points behind). Another unchanged trend between 2006 and 2021 is that First Nations on reserve and Inuit have the lowest percent attainment across all levels of qualification (Figure 44).

**Figure 44: Changes in High School, College, Trade/Apprenticeship and University Completion Rates by Identity Group, 2006 to 2021, Canada**

### Changes in High School, College, Trade/Apprenticeship and University Completion Rates by Identity Group, 2006 to 2021



Source: Census, 2006, 2021.

### Urban versus Rural Findings

A study released in late 2023 by Statistics Canada found that location had a greater bearing on educational attainment than other factors. According to their 2021 data, 54.7% of Indigenous people living in easily

accessible areas completed a post-secondary qualification compared to 42.9% among those living in remote areas and 27.0% in very remote areas. The effect of living in remote locations for post-secondary education attainment was more pronounced for Inuit. In the same year, only 21.7% of Inuit living in very remote areas had a post-secondary qualification compared to the 49.4% living in easily accessible areas. This significant difference is attributed to over 69% of Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat, which all areas of are considered remote or very remote. Only 23.7% of Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat have a post-secondary qualification compared to the 52.8% outside of Inuit Nunangat who do.

For Registered or Treaty Indian Status First Nations<sup>56</sup>, the level of remoteness also had notable effects on the attainment of post-secondary qualifications. In 2021, 47.6% of First Nations living off reserve had a post-secondary qualification compared to the 34.0% residing on reserve who did. Around 60.4% of those living on reserve were in remote areas with limited or no access to post-secondary opportunities (Figure 45).<sup>57</sup>

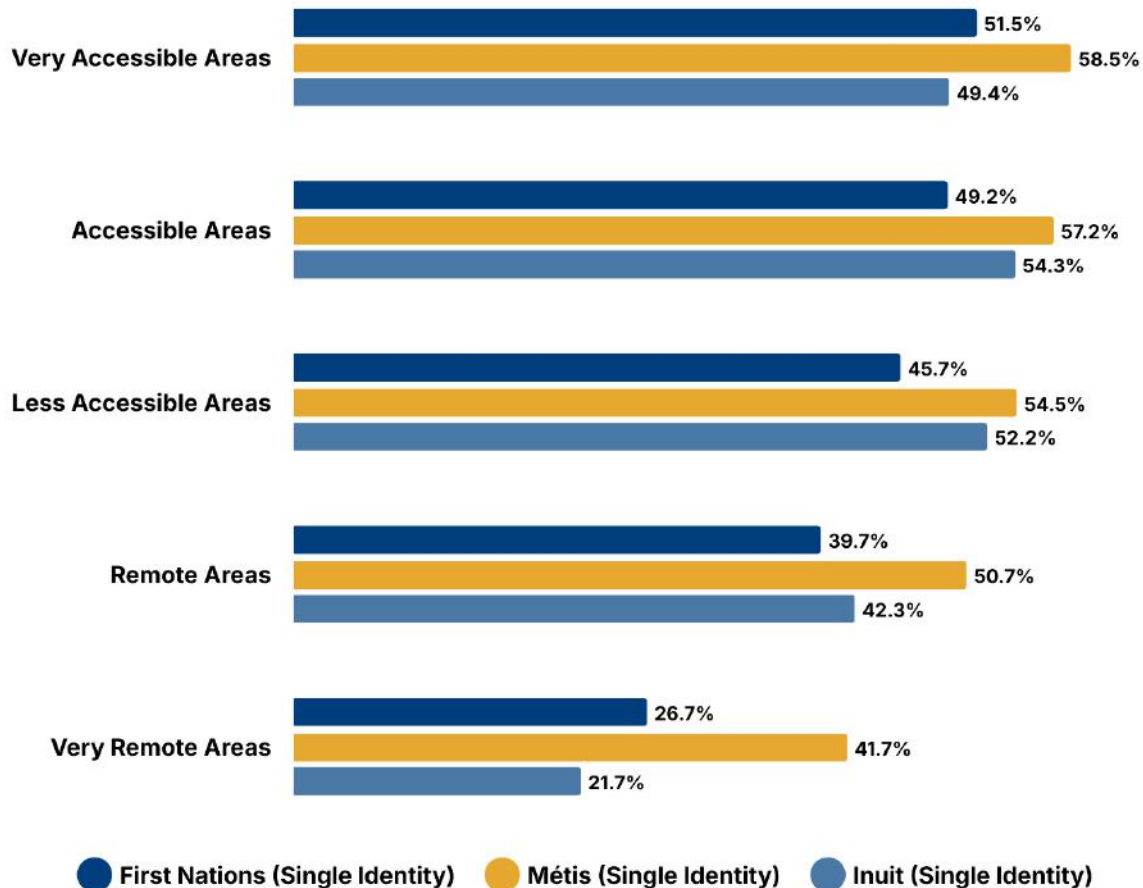
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<sup>56</sup> “Registered Indians” are Indigenous persons who are registered under the *Indian Act of Canada*. “Treaty Indians” are Indigenous persons who belong to a First Nation or Indian band that signed a treaty with the Crown.

<sup>57</sup> Statistics Canada. (2023, October 27). *Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes of Indigenous peoples, 2021*.

Figure 45: Percent of Population (25 to 64 Years) with a Post-Secondary Qualification by Identity Group and Level of Remoteness, 2021, Canada

## Percent of Population (25 to 64 Years) with a Post-Secondary Qualification by Identity Group and Level of Remoteness, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. (2023, October 27). Postsecondary educational attainment and labour market outcomes of Indigenous peoples, 2021.

- Attainment percents of a post-secondary qualification is highest for distinction groups in very accessible areas and decreases the less accessible and more remote the area.
- Métis had the highest percent of post-secondary qualification attainment across all levels of remoteness.
- Inuit in very remote areas see the lowest post-secondary qualification attainment at 21.7%.

It is notable that the gap in high school and post-secondary education attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is smaller in the Atlantic provinces than the Prairie provinces. Statistics Canada attributes this difference to the higher percentage of First Nation youth residing on reserve in the Prairie provinces than in the Atlantic. All Prairie provinces are above the 33% Canadian average of youth living

on reserve, with the most being 46% in the Northwest Territories. In contrast, all Atlantic provinces are below the Canadian average, with the least being 5% in Newfoundland and Labrador.<sup>58</sup>

As noted within the “Indigenous Agency in Education” section of this chapter, there is an education agreement with twelve Nova Scotia First Nations Communities, one with Elsipogtog First Nation in New Brunswick, as well as a Treaty Education memorandum in Nova Scotia. The higher education attainment rates in the Atlantic provinces can assumingly be attributed to the Indigenous-led and controlled on-reserve schools and the treaty education taught within the provincially ran schools. As exemplified within that section, a high rate of high school graduation and post-secondary enrollment is seen by incorporating Indigenous influence, knowledge, culture, history and language within the curriculum. When Nova Scotia first took control over on-reserve education, the First Nation high school graduation rate was 30% which has since increased substantially to over 90%. Indigenous immersion programs have been shown to contribute to this success which are increasingly being offered through the education agreements.

### **Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqi Latuwewakon Immersion Programs**

Indigenous immersion programs incorporate linguistic and cultural knowledge into the everyday curriculum, leading to academic, identity and language benefits for current and former immersion students. In a study by The Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program (AAEDIRP), former immersion students showed qualities of high self-esteem, intellectual curiosity, strong work ethic, and awareness and pride in ancestral language and culture. These qualities create lifelong learners, engaged community members, and accomplished professionals.

The positive effects on former Indigenous immersion program students below were captured in the study:

- Strong sense of confidence, pride and leadership. Students have the ability to be leaders in our communities and beyond.
- Very social and eager to learn new things, which are characteristics of life-long learners, active community members, and career men and women.
- Good sense of humour and ability to laugh at themselves. This is an important quality in Mi’kmaq culture and is useful as workers and participants in community affairs.
- Strong work ethic and positive attitude towards schoolwork, which connects to the confidence and educational curiosity also observed in this study. A strong work ethic is an important trait to have in the workforce and as active members of the community.
- Ability to maintain good academic standing while being involved in numerous extra-curricular activities.
- Overall, found to be at the top in the academic classes and have higher attendance compared to students who weren’t in the program.
- Self-motivated as learners, a quality that is important for academic and career success.
- Excited and eager to share what they learned, which is essential for passing the language and culture to future generations.<sup>59</sup>

The impact of living in a remote location versus an urban area on achieving at least a high school diploma is much greater for the Indigenous population compared to the non-Indigenous population. 80% of Indigenous people living in a CMA and 77% of those living in a POPCTR have at least a high school diploma.

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<sup>58</sup> Layton, J. (2023, June 21). *First Nations youth: Experiences and outcomes in secondary and postsecondary learning*. Statistics Canada.

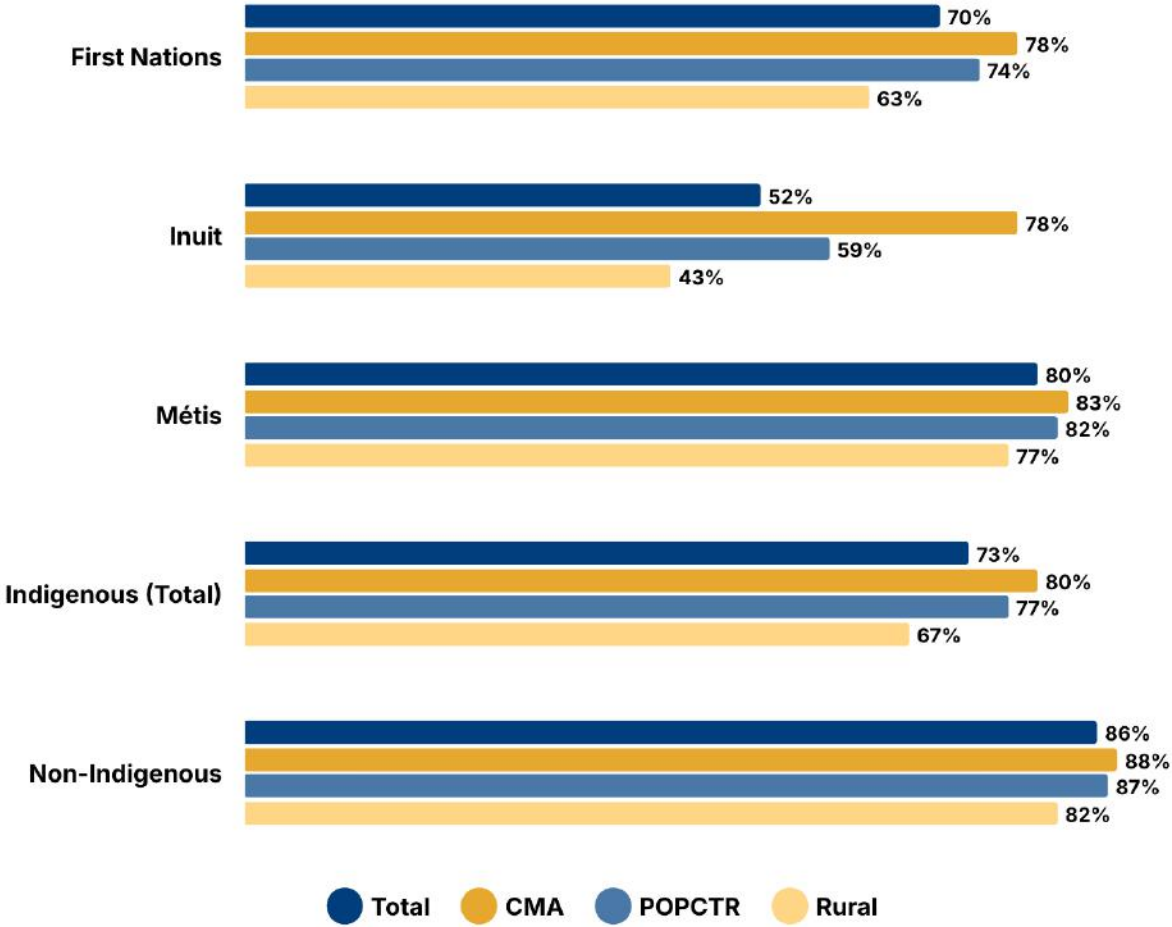
<sup>59</sup> Tompkins, J. et al. (2011). *Best Practices and Challenged in Mi’kmaq and Maliseet/Wolastoqi Language Immersion Programs*. The Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program.



In contrast, 67% of the Indigenous population in rural areas have at least a high school diploma. For the non-Indigenous population, residing in a rural or urban area does not have any significant effect in the attainment of at least a high school diploma. 82% of non-Indigenous persons living in rural locations have at least a high school diploma compared to the 88% living in CMAs (Figure 46).

**Figure 46: Percent of Population with at least a High School Diploma by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021**

## Percent of Population with at least a High School Diploma by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021



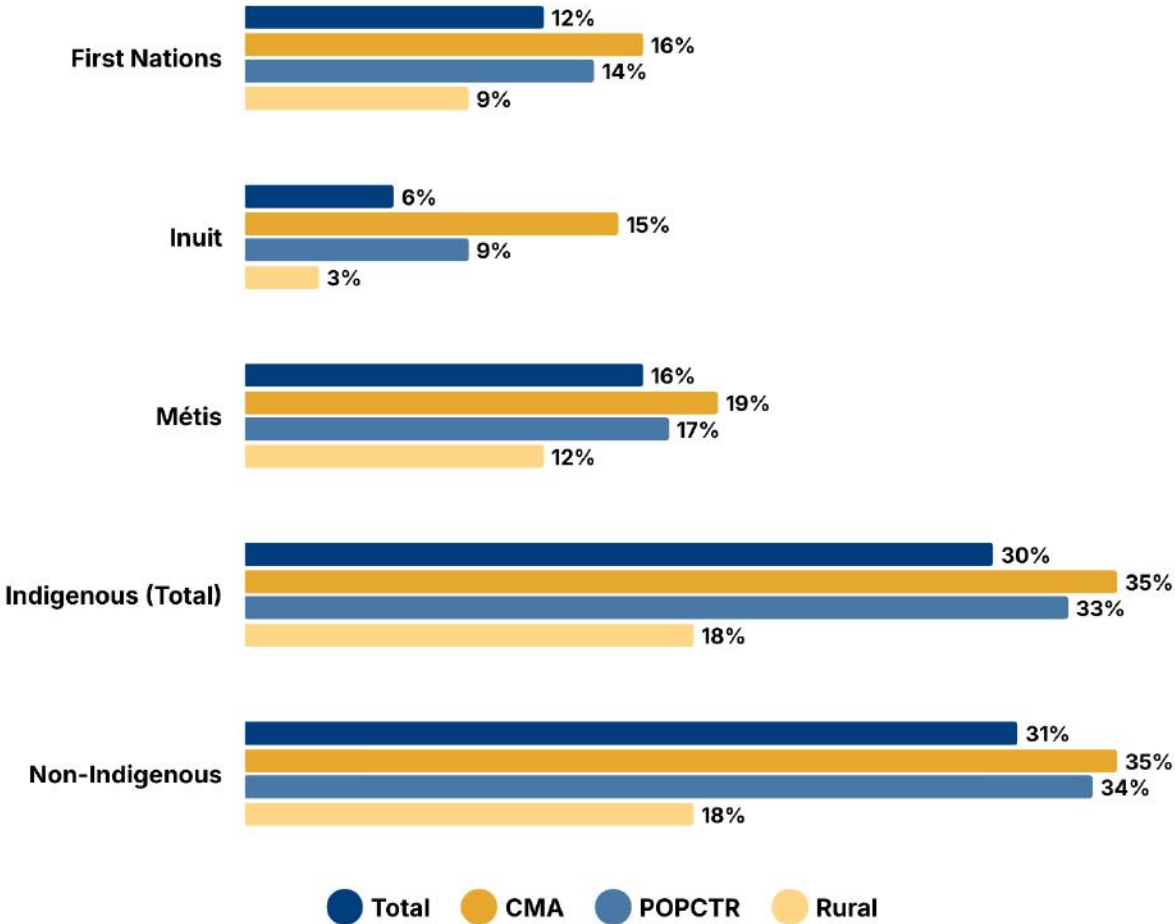
Source: Census, 2021.

- Residing in rural locations has negative effects on the attainment of at least a high school diploma for all Indigenous distinction groups and slightly for the non-Indigenous population.
- The attainment of at least a high school diploma was the lowest for Inuit residing in a rural location at 43%, followed by First Nations at 63%, and highest for Métis at 77%.

The difference that living in a remote location versus an urban area has on education is significant for the attainment of a university certificate, diploma, or degree. 35% of the Indigenous population living in a CMA have a university qualification, as well as 33% living in a POPCTR. This is in stark comparison to the only 18% of the Indigenous population in rural areas who have the same level of qualification. It is notable that these percentages are almost identical to those for the non-Indigenous population (Figure 47).

**Figure 47: Percent of Population with a University Certificate, Diploma or Degree by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021**

## Percent of Population with a University Certificate, Diploma or Degree by Identity Group, Urban, Rural and Canada, 2021



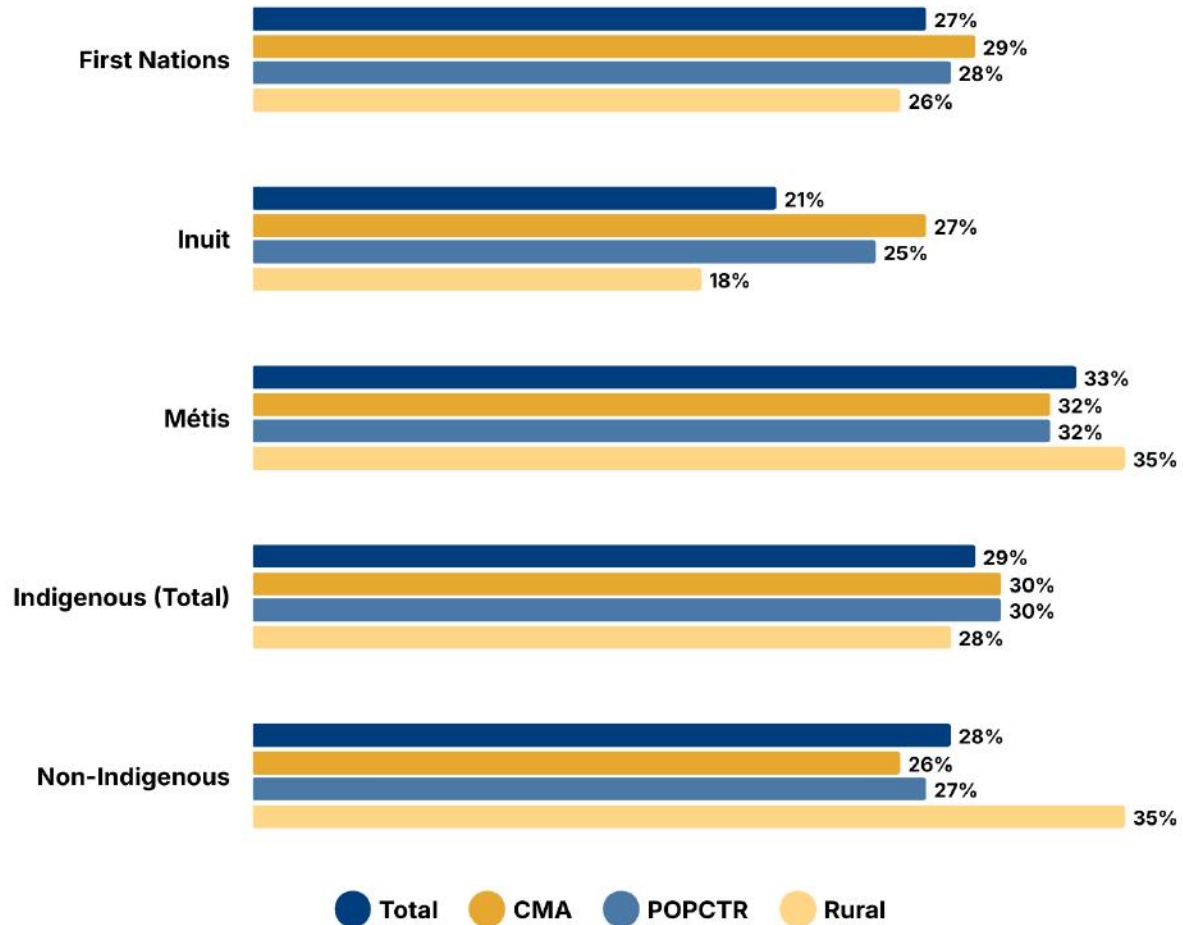
Source: Census, 2021.

- Residing in rural locations has negative effects on the attainment of a university certificate, diploma or degree for Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.
- The attainment of a university certificate, diploma or degree is lowest for Inuit residing in rural areas at only 3% followed by First Nations at 9%, and Métis at 12%.
- Both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations had 35% attainment of a university certificate, diploma or degree for the CMA residents, and 18% attainment for the rural residents.

For First Nations, Métis and non-Indigenous populations, residing in rural locations seems to have minimal to no effect on the attainment of a college, trade, apprenticeship, or other non-university qualification. In fact, 35% of both the Métis and non-Indigenous populations in rural locations have such qualifications which is above the percentage of those in CMAs and POPCTRs. For First Nations, 26% of their rural population have this type of qualification in comparison to the 29% of the CMA population and 28% of the POPCTR who do. However, for Inuit, the significant effect that rural location has on education attainment remains true for a college, trade, apprenticeship, or other non-university qualification (Figure 48). A possible explanation for the lack of effect may be that there are more colleges or other non-university post-secondary institutions than universities, and more are located in rural areas.

Figure 48: Percent of Population with a College, Trade/Apprenticeship or Other Non-University Certificate, Diploma or Degree by Identity, Geographic Region, Canada, 2021

## Percent of Population with a College, Trade/Apprenticeship or Other Non-University Certificate, Diploma or Degree by Indigenous Identity, Geographic Region, 2021



Source: Census, 2021.

- Residing in rural areas has minimal to no negative effect on the attainment of a college, trade/apprenticeship or other non-university qualification for the First Nation, Métis and non-Indigenous populations.
- Métis and non-Indigenous populations living in rural areas both had 35% attainment of a college, trade/apprenticeship or other non-university qualification, 9 and 8 percentage points above CMA and POPCTR populations, respectively.
- For First Nations, attainment of this type of a college, trade/apprenticeship or other non-university qualification was 26% for residents of rural locations which is 3 and 2 percentage points below CMA and POPCTR populations, respectively.
- Inuit had the most significant effect with 18% of the rural population having a college, trade/apprenticeship or other non-university qualification compared to 27% and 25% for CMA and POPCTR populations, respectively.

## Post-secondary Education is a Treaty Right: Government Funding for Post-secondary Students

### Informing Recommendations: The Right to Education

Of the approximately 130,000 Indigenous students qualified to begin post-secondary in Fall 2023, it was estimated that 70% would not be able to enroll due to inadequate funding.<sup>60</sup> Even though there is not the guarantee of funding through the government to subsidize education costs, institutions are helping to fill the gap. A study in 2019 by Universities Canada on Indigenous reconciliation found that “[m]ore than 90% of universities offer financial aid specifically earmarked for Indigenous students, including 80% that offer need-based bursaries and 76% that offer merit-based scholarships.”<sup>61</sup> From 2004-2020, Indspire’s Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards Program (BBF) has supported more than 37,500 First Nation, Inuit, and Métis post-secondary students. In 2019-2020, Indspire awarded \$17.8 million to students through over 5100 awards and bursaries. In a survey conducted for BBF award recipients, students stated that the program allowed them more time to study, volunteer, be with family, and supported their overall capacity to complete their program. These BBF recipients also reported on their labour market experience, stating that their education has prepared them for the work force and is being utilized in their current role.<sup>62</sup>

### Inhibiting Factors

There are several factors inhibiting Indigenous populations from pursuing and completing post-secondary education, including insufficient funding, colonial academic institutions, close connections to family and community, and family backgrounds/situations. These factors are often related to one another and work together to intensify the difficulties Indigenous students face. It is essential to address the barriers to educational attainment to ensure that progress is made. In this section, various studies, surveys and reports are examined and outlined to understand the reasoning behind the statistics reported in this chapter and provide a basis for recommendations on how to progress.

In 2021, the University of Alberta conducted an open-ended survey for self-identifying Indigenous students at the institution regarding their experience. Through the answers of 232 students (50.8% First Nations, 45.3% Métis, 1.7% Inuit, and the remaining identifying as ‘other’), seven barriers to their success in post-secondary education were identified: financial issues (25.9%), the COVID-19 pandemic (19.8%), mental health (15.7%), issues relating to professors and supervisors (15.7%), a lack of social support (15.7%), racism (6.6%), and a lack of Indigenous representation (5.6%). While not explicitly mentioned, these barriers may be an indirect result of not being able to study in or near one’s home community, and the lack of familial, social, and cultural support that this may bring. The student’s identified that these barriers affect their academic performance, ability to focus, and their mental well-being, which leads to dropping or failing courses, or leaving the program.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, a study by Indspire found that students who have left post-secondary institutions prior to completion reported a range of factors influencing their

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<sup>60</sup> Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. (2023). *Evidence*. 44th Parliament, 1st session, meeting no. 058.

<sup>61</sup> Universities Canada. (2019). *Empowering Indigenous students and advancing reconciliation*.

<sup>62</sup> Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business & Indspire. (2020). *Insights into Indigenous Post-Secondary Graduates’ Experiences in the Canadian Workforce*.

<sup>63</sup> Glanfield, F., Kermaal, N., Lindquist, K., & Parrish, M. (2022). *Indigenous Student Success Survey (2021) Report*. University of Alberta.

decisions to leave university, including negative experiences living at college, mental health concerns and “burnout,” poor fit of the degree with their interests, and a lack of a cohort of Indigenous students.<sup>64</sup>

## Funding

Although post-secondary education is a treaty right guaranteed by Canada to Indigenous Peoples that was first asserted in the *Royal Proclamation* of 1763 and re-affirmed as a constitutional right in the Canadian *Constitution Act* of 1982, often the lack of funding inhibits Indigenous youth from seeking higher education.

In a survey conducted in 2000 by Indspire, Indigenous students indicated that funding played a critical role in the success of their post-secondary experience, and the cost of education has only gone up. In 1990, a student needed to work 293 hours earning a minimum wage to cover their tuition expenses. By 2018, the number of hours needed to work to cover tuition expenses increased to more than 500 hours. The expenses of post-secondary education result in 20% percent of Canadian graduates with a bachelor’s degree finishing their postsecondary career with \$25,000 or more in debt.<sup>65</sup> Financial support for Indigenous students is more important than ever in ensuring their educational success.

In 2021, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) calculated that First Nations require a minimum of \$29,548 per year to attend post-secondary education. This calculation included the 2021 average of the MBM for persons not in economic families plus the average cost of tuition, books, and ancillary fees. However, the funding that First Nation bands receive to allocate to students is an insufficient amount to account for the number of aspiring students, and the increased costs needed for the student’s mental health supports, childcare, travel, groceries, accommodations, northern costs and supplies.<sup>66</sup>

ISC is responsible for providing funding mechanisms to help Indigenous students pay for the costs of post-secondary education and living, including:

- The Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) and the University and College Entrance Preparation Program (UCEPP) are for First Nation students registered under the *Indian Act* and who can maintain a satisfactory academic standing. Funding is provided through the First Nation band or a designated First Nation organization responsible for determining selection criteria and allocating the funding. The maximum amount of funding a student can receive per year, is \$53,000 or \$90,000 for professional, masters, or doctoral programs. These figures are both maximums and only given in extraordinary circumstances.<sup>67</sup>
- The Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy (IPSES) provides funding to Inuit students. Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami and the four Inuit land-claim organizations determine eligibility and coordinate funding distribution. Again, the maximum funding a full-time student can receive is \$75,000 per

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<sup>64</sup> Herkimer, J. (2021). *Holding Our Ground: Indigenous Student Post-Secondary Persistence & Early Leaving*. Indspire.

<sup>65</sup> King, C. (2018, June 18). *The Cost of Credentials: The Shifting Burden of Post-Secondary Education in Canada*. Royal Bank of Canada.

<sup>66</sup> Policy Co-development Team. (2021). *Policy Proposal: First Nations-led, local, regional and/or Treaty-based Post-Secondary Education Models*. Assembly of First Nations.

<sup>67</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. (2023, October 12). *Post-secondary Student Support Program and University and College Entrance Preparation Program: National Guidelines 2023 to 2024*. Government of Canada.

year but may increase to \$100,000 per year for students enrolled in a professional, masters, or doctoral program.<sup>68</sup>

- The Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy (MNPSES) provides financial support to Métis Nation students pursuing post-secondary education, determined and distributed by the MNC and the five Métis Nation organizations who have contribution agreements. Under the MNPSES, the maximum fundings are the same as the PSSSP and the UCEPP.

In all three programs, part-time students may receive assistance for tuition and fees, books and supplies, living allowances, or travel.<sup>69</sup>

For these programs, funding is limited, and demand often exceeds the supply, therefore, access is dependant on the total amount available for the program/strategy, and the number of recipient bands/organizations.

The AFN's 2018 *First Nations Post-Secondary Education Review (PSER) Interim Report* found that from 2012-2016, PSSSP funded students received an average of \$10,574.5 per year, an amount they concluded as insufficient to cover the costs of living and attending post-secondary. Of the 32,690 First Nation students enrolled in post-secondary education in 2015, only 23,625 of them received funding through PSSSP. The AFN determined that for that year, the PSSSP needed to increase funding by 150.3% to adequately cover the costs for all First Nation students wishing to pursue post-secondary education.<sup>70</sup>

In Budget 2021, \$150.6 million in total was allocated to the PSSSP, UCEPP, IPSES, and MNPSES across two years. The Canadian Federation of Students estimated that there were 32,000 Indigenous students attending post-secondary as of October 2021, which would mean that if the funds were distributed equally, each student would receive \$4706.25. So, although these programs are supposed to support Indigenous students in pursuit of post-secondary degrees, funding through the PSSSP, UCEPP, IPSES and MNPSES is not guaranteed, or if a student's grades slip below "satisfactory academic standing," they will lose their funding.<sup>71</sup>

The gap between students attaining post-secondary and those who receive funding continues to grow. In 2017-2018, there were 54,805 First Nations enrolled in a post-secondary program versus only 24,772 being funded by PSSSP.<sup>72</sup> Of the approximately 130,000 Indigenous students qualified to begin post-secondary in Fall 2023, it was estimated that 70% would not be able to enroll due to inadequate funding. This population demographic is growing at a rate of 9.4% and funding is not keeping up to ensure they can attend post-secondary if they wish.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. (2020, January 31). *Grants and contributions to support the Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy*. Government of Canada.

<sup>69</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. (2020, September 10). *Contributions to support the Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy*. Government of Canada.

<sup>70</sup> Thompson, K. T. & Hill-MacDonald, G. L. (2018). *First Nations Post-Secondary Education Review*. Assembly of First Nations.

<sup>71</sup> Canadian Federation of Students & Ontario. (2021). *Factsheet: Indigenous Education*.

<sup>72</sup> Policy Co-development Team. (2021). *Policy Proposal: First Nations-led, local, regional and/or Treaty-based Post-Secondary Education Models*. Assembly of First Nations.

<sup>73</sup> Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. (2023). *Evidence*. 44th Parliament, 1st session, meeting no. 058.

## Culturally Aligned Academia and Supports

A greater number of educational institutions are recognizing the importance of Indigenous cultural safety and student supports through the creation of Indigenous student centres providing Indigenous-specific supports and community. In Canada, many universities have Indigenous centres.. This is needed as 45% of Indigenous students report experiencing racism, isolation, and the marginalization of Indigenous student knowledge. Considering the impact this has on post-secondary success, it is essential that post-secondary institutes provide Indigenous students with culturally appropriate education and supports. This requires more Indigenous professors, mandatory Indigenous history training for faculty, and an overall focus on decolonizing the institution.<sup>74</sup> Further, the implementation of Indigenous student services and Indigenous mentorship programs have been attributed to the success of Indigenous students in post-secondary education.<sup>75</sup>

Indigenous centres at universities are key for building a sense of community and belonging for Indigenous students. The physical space of Indigenous centres is particularly significant to provide a space where Indigenous students can connect with each other, with staff and with their own cultural identities. Additionally, Indigenous tutoring assistance is an important strategy to assist Indigenous students to complete their degrees. Work designed to encourage faculties to collaborate further with Indigenous centres and to decolonize institutional practices and curricular supports Indigenous students to complete their degrees and increases broad awareness of Canadian history and the need for reconciliation. More Indigenous perspectives in the classroom are needed to support Indigenous students' learning outcomes and to provide examples of engaging with Indigenous knowledges and cultural contexts in teaching and learning.<sup>76</sup>

A post-secondary program exists in Ottawa aimed at empowering Inuit youth which was started in 1988. The Nunavut Sivuniksavut Institute is dedicated to providing Inuit youth with the best possible post-secondary academic and cultural learning experiences. Their focus on Inuit studies, cultural learning, and promoting Inuit ambassadors ensures that Inuit youth attending this institute are equipped with the skills to successfully contribute to the world as young adults, while embracing and learning about their Inuit culture.

The success of this program has in part inspired a new program in Quebec for Cree college students.<sup>77</sup> Partnering with the English CEGEP John Abbott college, the one-year Iyeskuwiiu Springboard to Diploma of College Studies Program offers a nine-course, 16-credit program based on Cree history for students from across the Eeyou Istchee. As the head of the program explained to CBC news that “[t]he idea is to allow young people to begin their post-secondary education without having to also manage the culture shock and systemic barriers to their success that too often exist in the South.”

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<sup>74</sup> Canadian Federation of Students & Ontario. (2021). *Factsheet: Indigenous Education*.

<sup>75</sup> Indigenous Institutes Consortium. (2020). *Programs & Services: A Comparative Analysis*.

<sup>76</sup> Fredericks, B., Barney, K., Bunda, T., Hausia, K., Martin, A., Elston, J., Bernardino, B., & Griffiths, D. (2022). *Building the evidence to improve completion rates for Indigenous students*. Curtin University.

<sup>77</sup> Bell, S. (2022, March 16). *Cree high school grads can now start college-level education at home*. CBC News.



## First Nations University of Canada

The First Nations University (FNU) has three campuses located on the atim kâ-mihkosit (Red Dog) Urban Reserve, Star Blanket Cree Nation, and Treaty 4 Territory. FNU provides post-secondary education programs that are based on a foundation of Indigenous Knowledge, administered and mandated by First Nations people. Programs involve the bridging of ceremonies, knowledge keepers, traditional languages, and traditions with the delivery of high-quality education to foster the pride and success of First Nations.



FNU first opened as the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College in 1976 with nine students enrolled and offering six programs: Indian Studies, Indian Languages, Indian Teacher Education, Social Work, Fine Arts (Indian Art and Indian Art History), and Social Sciences. Now, FNU offers nine undergraduate programs: Indigenous Business and Public Administration, Indigenous Communication and Fine Arts, Indigenous Education, Indigenous Health Studies, Indigenous Languages, Indigenous Literatures in English, Indigenous Social Work, Indigenous Studies, and Indigenous Knowledge and Science. FNU also offers three Indigenous master programs in education, language education, and social work. Through their community and web-based programs, students are able to remain in their communities while completing their program. FNU also has an Indigenous Continuing Education Centre which offers various non-degree courses in topics that align with 6 of the TRC's Calls to Action: language and culture, child welfare, education, health, justice, and reconciliation. FNU offers many services including a library, student success services, elder services, childcare services, counselling, community engagement initiatives, transportation services, athletics and recreation services, student associations, and scholarships, awards and bursaries.<sup>78</sup>

In Fall 2021, there were 6,033 students enrolled at FNU, 1,275 of which were in the Community-Based and Web-based programs. In Spring 2021 and Fall 2021, 222 students graduated from FNU, totaling 5,880 graduates since opening. The majority of FNU alumni's have graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work followed by a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Indigenous Education, and a Bachelor/Certificate in Administration.<sup>79</sup>

Image source: First Nations University of Canada. (2022, April 18). *The First Nations University of Canada adds inaugural Vice President, University Relations to the Senior Leadership Team.*

Indigenous institutes provide education rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing and being and studies show that Indigenous students excel in these institutes partly due to the greater sense of community and belonging. However, they are also very underfunded. In Ontario, there are nine Indigenous institutions which rely on government funding for their operations, yet they receive half the amount required for

<sup>78</sup> First Nations University of Canada. (2020). *About Us.*

<sup>79</sup> First Nations University of Canada. (N/A). *2021-2022 Annual Report.*

services and infrastructure like housing assistance, counselling services, cafeterias, and to pay the full-time faculty.<sup>80</sup>

### Community and Family

Some Indigenous students come to a post-secondary institution in a different circumstance than the traditional student demographic. They may be older with a spouse and/or family, or they may have ceremonial or community responsibilities in their home community creating challenges unaccounted for within a traditional post-secondary framework.<sup>81</sup>

In a First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission survey on the workforce and employment conducted upon First Nations aged 15-64 in Quebec, participants considered their family (95%) and identity (92%) to be the most important facets of life, with work coming third (85%). Further, economic advancement and wellness of the community was found to be the driving factor for many First Nations in their work rather than individual wealth accumulation. The Commission notes that the importance of family, community, and identity may be a deterring factor for an Indigenous person to leave their community in the pursuit of studies or the attainment of a job. In fact, 91% of workers living in a First Nation community are employed there. Thirty-one percent reported that they work in their community to remain closer to their family, and 30% stated they do so to give back to their community. Of the workers who have jobs outside of their First Nation community, 47% stated that this is due to the lack of job opportunities in their community. Additionally, the barriers to economic development and the lack of resources for employment integration in their communities may diminish an Indigenous person's motivation to attend post-secondary in the pursuit of a career.<sup>82</sup>

For all students, social engagement and supports are key elements of the educational experience, but these features increase in importance for students who relocate to pursue education. Some Indigenous students must leave their communities to pursue high school, and many, if not most, Indigenous students seeking post-secondary education must relocate to attend post-secondary institutions which are less frequently available within their communities. Social supports, including personal connections on campus and social bonding, have been found to have an impact on retention rates, with those lacking strong social bonds found to be 1.19 times more likely not to complete their post-secondary education, and first-year students without someone to talk to on campus about personal issues 1.54 times more likely to drop out.<sup>83</sup> University students whose family supports are out-of-province are 1.32 times more likely per semester to drop out. The cumulative effect of this distance from family supports and low entry grades is a 30% drop out rate in second year, and a 60% drop out rate before completion. For students with high entry grades and close family supports, only 14% drop out prior to completion. Access to family and academic supports as well as the formation of personal connections are essential factors for decreasing

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<sup>80</sup> Canadian Federation of Students & Ontario. (2021). *Factsheet: Indigenous Education*. <https://cfsontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Indigenous-Education-Factsheets-2021-EN.pdf>

<sup>81</sup> Drywater-Whitekiller, V. (2020). First Nations, Métis, and Inuit University Students' Share Advice for College Entry and Retention. *Journal of Indigenous Research*, 8 (2020).

<sup>82</sup> First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission. (2021). "Education, skills and aspirations." *First Nations Labour and Employment Development Survey* (C0743).

<sup>83</sup> Ma, X. & Frempong, G. (2014). Profiles of Canadian Postsecondary Education dropouts. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 59(2), 141-161.

the drop out rate.<sup>84</sup> Pandemic disruptions to learning worsened social engagement and has been recognized to have negatively impacted enrollment and completion rates.

A person's family background/situation also acts as an inhibiting factor to attending post-secondary. A new longitudinal study done by Statistics Canada investigated the impact of housing and household incomes on educational attainment rates. It found that suitable housing and higher household income during childhood are associated with high school completion and higher education among First Nation, Métis, and Inuit young adults. Suitable housing is defined as a home that has enough bedrooms for the size and make-up of its residents. 68.2% of First Nation children living off reserve in suitable housing in 2006 had graduated high school or post-secondary by 2016 in comparison to the 49.6% of First Nation children living off reserve in unsuitable housing that had. For Inuit children in the same study, 54.3% of those living in suitable housing in 2006 had graduated with such qualifications by 2016 compared to the 32.4% living in unsuitable housing. Additionally, 75.4% of Métis children living in suitable housing in 2006 had graduated by 2016, and 55.8% living in unsuitable housing had. First Nation children living off reserve, Métis, and Inuit children with household incomes in the fourth quartile (the highest) had completed high school or a higher education of around 22.4%, 22.3%, and 37.1%, respectively, higher than those with household incomes in the first quartile (the lowest).<sup>85</sup>

Outside of the curriculum and in-school supports, other factors contribute to the success of primary and secondary students such as nutrition and family support. Research has linked nutritious meals to the educational success of students. In the 2024 Budget, the Government of Canada announced a new National School Food Program with a target of providing meals to 400,000 more kids every year, beyond those served by existing school food programs. The equal and successful implementation of this program is essential, especially as the lack of access to food disproportionately impacts children from Indigenous communities.<sup>86</sup> Research also shows that parental engagement in their children's everyday lives positively contributes to their child's high school completion. This involvement goes beyond the child's academic activities.<sup>87</sup> The importance of communities and individuals working with and supporting youth in long-term educational success must be emphasized.

## Looking Ahead: Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Education

In March of 2020, COVID-19 caused widespread closures of businesses and public services, resulting in students beginning a multi-year journey of disrupted learning. A rapid need to transition to on-line learning caused many challenges to education but for Indigenous students, these immense challenges were amplified. These challenges included lack of connectivity, lack of equipment, and for students who leave their communities to attend high school, potentially other challenges related to relocation.

The impact of these widespread and lengthy learning disruptions remains to be seen. The 2021 Census only looked at data for those aged twenty-five and older. Data and discussion for those under age twenty-five is contained in the Youth chapter of this report.

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<sup>84</sup> Sosu, E.M. & Pheunpha, P. (2019). Trajectory of university dropout: Investigating the cumulative effect of academic vulnerability and proximity to family support. *Frontiers in Education*, 4(6).

<sup>85</sup> Statistics Canada. (2023, April 6). *Study: Childhood factors associated with high school completion or higher education among off-reserve First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children*.

<sup>86</sup> Prime Minister of Canada. (2024, April 1). *A National School Food Program to set kids up for success*.

<sup>87</sup> Kantova, K. (2024). Parental involvement and education outcome of their children. *Applied Economics*, 1-16.

## Closing the Gap

In the overnight model of gap closure, the AFN and the Centre for the Study of Living Standard calculated what would need to be done to instantaneously fully close the First Nation education gap in accordance with 2021 data. It was determined that there would need to be an additional \$5.5 billion in First Nation employment income and 70,913 more jobs for First Nations people. If the income and employment gaps, which are conditional upon education, were also to be closed instantaneously and simultaneously in 2021, this would be associated with a total of \$7.7 billion in employment income and an additional 85,000 jobs.

In the longitudinal model of gap closure, closing the education gap by 2041 is associated with economic benefits of an additional \$233 billion in First Nation GDP and 1,046,000 additional job-years (a single job over one year) for First Nations. Closing all three gaps (education, income, and employment) by 2041 could produce economic benefits reaching an additional \$369 billion in GDP and 1,822,000 job years for First Nations.<sup>88</sup>

By using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a theory inspired by Blackfoot Nation wisdom<sup>89</sup>, addressing social, esteem, and self-actualization needs are of a lesser priority to a person than addressing physiological and safety needs. In applying this theory to the education gap between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people, the effects of intergenerational trauma, assimilation, and systematic oppression are needed to be addressed before Indigenous Peoples are able to focus on the pursuit of higher education.<sup>90</sup> These negative effects resulting from a person's Indigenous background and identity follow them into their pursuit of post-secondary and cumulate into systematic barriers to educational attainment. As described in this chapter, inhibiting factors include inadequate funding, colonial institutions and experiences of racism, lack of culturally aligned supports, close connection to family and community and the common requirement to move away for post-secondary, one's family background such as income and housing, and residing in rural areas and/or on reserve. These related factors must be addressed to ensure that the growing rate of post-secondary aged Indigenous people have the required resources and culturally aligned supports needed to attend post-secondary and succeed.

## Conclusion

Overall, the education completion rates at all levels for the Indigenous population have improved in comparison with the 2016 data reported in the 2019 *IEPR*. However, the variances that remain across types of education, identity group, and location insinuate that more work is needed by governments, the private sector, civil society, and Indigenous communities to close the education gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

Generally, the Indigenous high school completion rate has increased and the gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations has narrowed by 1.8 percentage points since 2016. As reiterated throughout this chapter, culturally aligned academia and supports are essential factors for the success of Indigenous students. Indigenous control over primary and secondary education on reserve and the implementation of culturally aligned curriculum and supports is increasing and can be correlated to the

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<sup>88</sup> Centre for the Study of Living Standards. (2023). *Closing the First Nations Education Gap in Canada: Assessing Progress and Estimating the Economic Benefits – Census Data*. Assembly of First Nations.

<sup>89</sup> Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. (2007, December 17). *Rediscovering Blackfoot Science*. Government of Canada.

<sup>90</sup> Kremer, S., & Mah, K. (2021). *Improving Financial Literacy in Indigenous Communities*. Financial Consumer Agency of Canada.

increase in Indigenous high school completion and the gap decrease. This correlation is made evident by the success of the MK schools in Nova Scotia that are Indigenous-led and controlled. The success of these schools showcase the importance of Indigenous control over education. Further, they demonstrate that incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and learning must be embedded within the curriculum of all schools, at all levels, to ensure that Indigenous students feel that they are within a culturally-safe and uplifting space.

As observed throughout this chapter, support systems beyond the walls of the academic institution are also contributing factors to the success of students. It is important that institutions, governments, and communities alike continue to support students' basic needs, such as access to nutritious food, feelings of community and acceptance, and parental involvement in academic success.

The data presented throughout this chapter, particularly the decrease in college, trades, or apprenticeship completion suggests a shift towards focusing on obtaining university degrees, in part due to our expanding tech-based society. The decrease in college, trades, or apprenticeship completion means that there are shortages in these fields and provides an opportunity to create programs and to work with Indigenous organizations to encourage Indigenous youth to seek out careers in these areas. Further, due to the unpredictable nature of the workforce landscape, there must be adaptable, flexible, and interdisciplinary education programs that allow for students' career paths to be adaptable to the unpredictable and changing occupations as a result of technology. As was recommended in the 2019 *IEPR*, this involves bridging programs to support students who wish to upgrade college certifications to university degrees.

As described within the inhibiting factors section, funding remains a significant barrier preventing Indigenous Peoples from pursuing post-secondary education. A change in Indigenous education policies and an increase in funding is needed to support lifelong learning and to allow students the freedom to choose the school of their choice. Currently, many Indigenous communities only fund the first degree/diploma a student pursues and from select institutions. This is an expansion upon the 2019 *IEPR* recommendation to expand scholarship funding for Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education. Insignificant progress has been made to increase the funding for Indigenous students and, therefore, the recommendation must be reiterated and continuingly worked upon.

Observed throughout this chapter, Indigenous Peoples residing on reserve and/or in remote communities experience some of the lowest educational attainment rates. It is crucial that going forward, importance is placed on improving educational opportunities for all Indigenous groups, but particularly for those on reserve. In addition, it is paramount that supports for community-based education recognize the challenges faced by Indigenous students who must leave the community to attend high school and prioritize their physical and mental health, as well as cultural supports both where they attend high school and within the community to ensure ongoing student success.

#### 2019 *IEPR* Recommendations:

- ***Improve educational opportunities for the Indigenous population, especially First Nations on reserve. (Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 1, 16-18, 62)***
- ***Invest in distance education programs to assist remote students with obtaining higher levels of education would remove some barriers of expense and distance.***

- ***Ongoing and expanded scholarship funding for Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education.***

2024 IEPR Recommendations:

- ***Ensure that all Indigenous schools are equipped with necessary infrastructure and educational resources such as libraries and mentorship programs to foster economic success and offer remote schooling to attend post-secondary for Indigenous individuals living in rural and remote communities.***
- ***Establish a national institute focused on providing Indigenous resources, training, mentorship, tools, and templates to educational institutions, including distinct training for Indigenous teachers.***
- ***Allocate funding to encourage First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students to engage in traditional knowledge work to strengthen cultural connection and subsequently improve success in college and university.***
- ***Implement school-based health and nutrition programs to support students' physical and mental well-being, enhancing their ability to learn and thrive academically.***
- ***Recognize the importance of communities and individuals supporting youth in long-term educational success.***
- ***Increase financial assistance for indirect educational costs for Indigenous students such as housing, food, and transportation***
- ***Ensure access to distinctions-based, wraparound support services for Indigenous students including access to role models and mentors in the educational field***
- ***Adopt Indigenous culturally aligned curriculum and supports within all primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools***
- ***Increase post-secondary funding and allow for flexible education models including: lifelong education, upscaling and rescaling, freedom to determine the schools of one's choice, and flexible interdisciplinary programs.***
- ***Increase scholarships, grants, and support services for Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education. Create partnerships between universities and Indigenous communities to offer programs that address specific community needs.***

- *Ensure that education funding, programs, and policies are directed and managed by Indigenous communities.*
- *Develop income supplement programs to support Indigenous families. These programs could include child care, housing subsidies, public transportation, and tax credits to reduce financial stress and improve quality of life.*

## UNDERLYING INDICATOR #2: ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND BUSINESS

*“Both economic development and economic reconciliation are important goals of the Métis Nation. Development, to ensure that Métis economic growth is sustainable to support our future sons and daughters, and reconciliation, to restore working relationships between the Métis Nation and our non-Métis business partners. As we work to strengthen our economic development, we are also Nation-building.”*

– Métis National Council President Cassidy Caron

### Entrepreneurship & Business Highlights

Clearly defining Indigenous businesses and verifying claims of Indigeneity are important factors for ensuring that contracts and revenues are awarded to Indigenous Peoples and avoid supporting false claims of identity.

#### Indigenous Entrepreneurs and Businesses

- Significant gaps exist in terms of entrepreneurship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations. For example, non-Indigenous businesses continue to dominate the Canadian economy, representing 98.68% of all private enterprises and 97.17% of self-employed entrepreneurs in Canada.
- Despite these gaps, Indigenous entrepreneurs contribute roughly \$48.9B to the Canadian economy and this figure could rise if systemic barriers, such as access to federal procurement, opportunities are removed.

#### Self-Employment Gap

As of 2021, the percentage of self-employed Indigenous Peoples was 9.8%, up from 7.4% in the 2016 Census and 6.8% in the 2006 Census. This trend has caused a reduction in the Indigenous to non-Indigenous self-employment gap from -5.2% in 2006 to -4.9% in 2021.



#### Indigenous Business by Firm Size



Indigenous firm size is a new measure being used for review and allows to infer that the majority of Indigenous firms have very few employees or none at all, with more than half the distribution coming from sole entrepreneurs and firms with 1 to 4 employees. In addition, Indigenous small and medium-sized enterprises appear to be outperforming the rest of small and medium-sized enterprises in Canada in growth of sales and revenues.

#### Indigenous Business by Industry

More than 50% of all Indigenous-owned businesses are heavily concentrated in five industries, including retail trade, construction, accommodation food services, professional, scientific, and technical services.

#### Gender-Specific Data

- Indigenous women-owned businesses reach \$1 million in annual revenue at half the rate of Indigenous men-owned businesses (9% for women versus 18% for men).
- Access to financing is a heightened barrier for Indigenous women entrepreneurs, with 33% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs in Ontario reporting it as an obstacle in 2020, compared with 30% of men.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous women-owned businesses were less likely than their male counterparts to have lending relationships with Aboriginal Financial Institutions (25% for women versus 32% for men).

## Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth and development. By creating new businesses and jobs, entrepreneurship generates economic impacts through spending on wages and salaries for employees, and through spending on suppliers' goods and services. Entrepreneurship also has direct and indirect impacts to the overall economy through output, gross national product, labour income, employment, and tax revenues. As such, Indigenous entrepreneurs and Indigenous-owned businesses are huge contributors in this regard and provide many positive impacts for the Canadian economy.



Indigenous entrepreneurship and business have always been an important topic for measuring Indigenous economic development in Canada and a key indicator cited within the *IEPRs*. Dating back to the first *IEPR* in 2011, the intention behind this indicator was to measure entrepreneurship and business development by using indirect indicators such as self-employment from the Canadian Census and reporting on profits and revenues from the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB) Aboriginal Business Survey. The first *IEPR* found significant gaps across the board for Indigenous Peoples in comparison to non-Indigenous peoples. The most recent progress report (2019) noted that these gaps are narrowing due to increasing trends in the percentage of self-employment and growth in both profits and revenues for Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

Consistent with the NIEDB's previous progress reports and in continuing to pursue the goal of economic benchmarking, this chapter will measure the state of entrepreneurship using data from the Canadian Census, Survey on Financing of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises, the Survey of Indigenous Firms from Global Affairs Canada, and the CCIB. To gain insight into the state of Indigenous entrepreneurship and business in Canada, the following indicators will be measured from these data sources: percentage of self-employment, firm size, industries, exporters, revenues, and profits.

### Definition of Indigenous Business

There are many definitions of Indigenous business. Many take an Indigenous business to be some sort of ownership structure whereby an Indigenous person(s) owns the majority, usually with a minimum 51% ownership, and distinguished by two different types of ownership structure: band-owned vs. individually owned. For example, in the *Survey on Financing and Growth of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises*, an Indigenous business is defined as a firm with more than 50 percent ownership by Indigenous persons, where Indigenous persons are individuals who identify with at least one Indigenous group (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit). Indigenous business has become increasingly pertinent in today's economy, particularly in the procurement space. The Government of Canada has made a commitment to increase Indigenous business participation in federal procurement by setting a minimum target of 5% of federal contracts to be awarded to Indigenous businesses. This standard has unfortunately opened the door to tokenism, false claims, and exploitation. Until very recently, the method used to verify Indigenous identity for the Government of Canada was self-identification through the "Affirmation of Indigenous Identity Form." The NIEDB and other experts in the field, including academia through numerous public reports<sup>91,92</sup>, recommended that a more rigorous definition system be developed to mitigate against false claims of Indigeneity.<sup>93</sup> In response to this, proof of Indigeneity and a verification process is now required in order for a business to be considered an "Indigenous business".

It is important to understand there is a socio-economic harm caused to communities when individuals make false claims to identity. These harms vary and can include Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous businesses losing out on job opportunities, procurement contracts, grants, and scholarships. In recent news, this issue has come to light with the ArriveCan app. ArriveCan was a mobile app developed by the Canadian government to facilitate travel during the pandemic. It allowed travelers to submit information related to their health status, vaccination, and quarantine requirements. Following an Auditor General

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<sup>91</sup> First Nations University & National Indigenous University Leaders' Association (2022). *Indigenous Voices on Indigenous Identity: What Was Heard Report*.

<sup>92</sup> Teillet, J. (2022). *Indigenous Identity Fraud: A Report for the University of Saskatchewan*.

<sup>93</sup> *National Indigenous Economic Strategy* (2022).

audit of the app, serious deficiencies in the app’s implementation and development were highlighted, including a disregard for contracting practices. One of the firms involved in the app, Dalian Enterprises, claimed it was “Aboriginally-owned” and received an estimated \$7.9 million in public funds for its work.<sup>94</sup> With numerous claims of conflict of interest and scrutiny regarding disregard for procurement obligations, the federal government announced that it is reviewing its Indigenous procurement policies with the goal of determining legitimate Indigenous status for bidding on federal contracts.

As a first step in ensuring that there is a consistent way of defining and verifying the legitimacy of Indigenous businesses, the NIEDB, in partnership with several national Indigenous organizations as part of the National Indigenous Procurement Working Group (NIPWG) and in cooperation with NACCA, has developed the most comprehensive definition of Indigenous business in Canada.<sup>95</sup> The NIPWG was established to facilitate the creation of an Indigenous Business Definition and to advocate for the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous businesses in federal procurement. This work was done with the intention to ensure Indigenous businesses registries are legitimized and that procurement opportunities and financing for Indigenous people are directed into the right hands.

The definition is approached with both a quantitative and qualitative criterion. Under the quantitative criteria, Indigenous business owners, directors of Indigenous corporations, and voting members from cooperatives must provide evidence of Indigenous identity from one of the following:

- Indian Status Card;
- Inuit Beneficiary Card;
- Northwest Territories Land Claim Settlement Beneficiary;
- Confirmed Alberta Metis Settlement Member;
- Northwest Territory Métis Nation citizenship;
- Métis Nation citizenship as affirmed through the registry of a Métis National Council Governing Member, which include the Manitoba Métis Federation, Métis Nation-Saskatchewan, Métis Nation of Alberta, Métis Nation British Columbia, and Métis Nation of Ontario; or,
- For Non-Status Indians, recognition of an individual can be verified through a First Nation Citizenship, Membership Code, or verification of heritage in writing from elected First Nation leadership.

From a qualitative perspective, Indigenous businesses must go through a certification process by:

- Demonstrating that they possess the relevant expertise and credentials to own the business;
- Demonstrating that they possess the capacity and experience to actively engage in operating the business;
- Demonstrating that the business structure was not contrived to benefit non-Indigenous business partners; and,
- Demonstrating that the Indigenous party in the business is receiving financial benefit from a business arrangement, contract, and revenue.

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<sup>94</sup> Tasker, J. P. (2024, February 27). *Feds reviewing Indigenous procurement policies as they grapple with ArriveCan revelations*. CBC News.

<sup>95</sup> National Indigenous Procurement Working Group. (2021). *Defining Indigenous Business in Canada*.

To be considered an Indigenous business, a business must meet both the quantitative and qualitative criteria identified above and must have a minimum of 51% Indigenous ownership by Indigenous nations, organizations, or people.

The NIPWG developed a list of Government of Canada business definitions accompanied by definitions that describe the degree of direct and meaningful participation, ownership, and benefit of Indigenous businesses or organizations as entities responding to procurement processes. The table below presents the scope of definitions:

**Table 4: Proposed Indigenous Business Definitions**

Government of Canada Definitions	Indigenous Definitions
Corporation (for profit)	<b>Indigenous Corporation (for profit)</b>
Shareholders are the legal owners of the corporation. Shareholders can be individuals or other corporations.	The majority of the shareholders are Indigenous individuals or groups. They have 51% of the voting rights.
Partnership	<b>Indigenous Partnership</b>
An association or relationship between two or more individuals, corporations, trusts, or partnerships that join together to carry on a trade or business.	The partnership agreement defines the Indigenous partner or partners as majority owners.
Cooperative	<b>Indigenous Cooperative</b>
A cooperative is a legally incorporated corporation that is owned by an association of persons seeking to satisfy common needs such as access to products or services, sale of their products or services, or employment. Co-operatives generally fit one of the following four types: consumer, producer, worker, or multi-stakeholder. Co-operatives are incorporated under a provincial, territorial, or federal Act.	Collectively, Indigenous cooperative voting members must comprise a minimum of 51% of cooperative members.
Joint Venture	<b>Indigenous Joint Venture</b>
Joint ventures are formed by a contract between two or more entities agreeing to combine resources or expertise with a view to carrying out a specific project or venture with the explicit expectation that the venture does not constitute a partnership. There are no express laws that govern contractual joint ventures as they are governed by contractual law of the jurisdiction selected by parties although courts may view joint ventures as a partnership. The joint venture may be contractual, corporate (limited or unlimited) under federal, provincial, or territorial legislation, or a partnership.	Individual ownership: The joint venture agreement defines the Indigenous partner or partners as majority (minimum 51%) owners.
Sole proprietorship	<b>Indigenous Sole Proprietorship</b>
An unincorporated business that is owned by one individual.	The business is 100% owned by an Indigenous person who has sole responsibility for making decisions, receives all profits, claims all losses, assumes all risks, and pays personal income tax (where applicable) on the net income generated by the business, and does not have separate legal status from the business.
Micro-Enterprise	<b>Micro-Enterprise</b>

Generally defined as businesses with fewer than five employees. Micro-enterprises may be sole proprietorships, partnerships, or corporations. Indigenous	See definitions for Indigenous sole proprietorship, partnerships, or corporations.
<b>Non-Profit or Not-for-Profit</b>	<b>Indigenous Non-Profit or Not-for-Profit</b>
A non-profit corporation is a legal entity separate from its members and directors formed for purposes other than generating a profit to be distributed to its members, directors, or officers. Non-profit corporations are formed pursuant to federal or provincial law.	The board of directors of the Indigenous non-profit is comprised of at least 51% Indigenous people. The most senior administrative executive is an Indigenous person and at least 51% of senior management are Indigenous. The non-profit's mission is focused on the social and economic betterment of Indigenous Peoples.
<b>Charitable Organizations</b>	<b>Indigenous Charitable Organizations</b>
Registered charities are organizations, public or private foundations that are created and resident in Canada. These organizations must use their resources for activities that have charitable purposes and that fall into one or more of the following categories: the relief of poverty, the advancement of education, the advancement of religion, or other purposes that benefit the community. Indigenous Charitable Organizations The board of directors of the Indigenous charitable organization is comprised of at least 51%	The board of directors of the Indigenous charitable organization is comprised of at least 51% Indigenous directors. If no board structure exists, the most senior administrative executive of the Indigenous charitable organization is an Indigenous person and at least 51% of senior management are Indigenous. The non-profit's mission is focused on the social and economic betterment of Indigenous Peoples.

The NIPWG's efforts in creating these business definitions contribute to economic empowerment, cultural resilience, and a more inclusive Canadian economy.

Indigenous social enterprises are not captured in the above-noted definitions list. These enterprises play a crucial role in promoting both economic growth and social well-being by combining business activities with a commitment to their communities and cultural values. An example of one such enterprise is the Indigenous Clean Energy Social Enterprise (ICE). ICE is a pan-Canadian not-for-profit platform that advocates for Indigenous inclusion in Canada's energy future economy. It aims to advance clean energy solutions while respecting Indigenous knowledge, sovereignty, and self-determination. This enterprise has been instrumental in supporting 10 remote Indigenous communities and First Nations through the Indigenous Off-Diesel Initiative.

Indigenous social enterprises are powerful agents of change, combining economic viability with cultural resilience and community well-being. Their work exemplifies the spirit of collaboration, reconciliation, and sustainable development.

Social enterprises are aligned with a recent global initiative that seeks to redefine capitalism by emphasizing social and environmental responsibility alongside financial success – the B Corp Movement. Driven by the B Lab, the B Corp Movement seeks to address fundamental injustices and inequalities in a capitalist society, many of which are faced by Indigenous communities. This collective effort aims to create a more conscious and purpose-driven business landscape, where profit is not the main driver. While not all companies participate in this movement, the ones that do commit to considering interests beyond the stakeholder to include customers, suppliers, communities, and investors.

## Number of Indigenous Entrepreneurs and Businesses

The exact number of Indigenous businesses in Canada is not known, but many sources claim that there are over 50,000.<sup>96</sup> Amongst private enterprises, Statistics Canada (2018) found there to be just under 17,000 Indigenous private enterprises, comprising 1.32% of all private enterprises in Canada. The number of private enterprises amongst the Indigenous groups were 7,929 for First Nations, 8,182 for Métis, and 328 for Inuit, consisting of 0.6 percent, 0.62 percent, and 0.02 percent of all private enterprises respectively (Table 5). This is in contrast to 1,298,636 non-Indigenous private enterprises, comprising 98.68% of all private enterprises. In terms of sole entrepreneurship, the latest Canadian Census (2021) found there to be 84,445 self-employed Indigenous Peoples, which represented 2.83% of all self-employed peoples in Canada (Table 6). This is in contrast to 1,298,636 self-employed non-Indigenous people, which represented 97.17% of all self-employed peoples in 2021. Furthermore, the number of self-employed individuals across the distinctions include 43,520 First Nations, 1,245 Inuit, and 38,305 Métis comprising 1.46 percent, 0.04 percent, and 1.28 percent of all self-employed individuals, respectively.

**Table 5: Private Enterprises by Indigenous Identity of Ownership and Enterprise Size**

	Total	Indigenous owned	First Nations	Métis	Inuk (Inuit)	Non-Indigenous owned
Total	1,315,999	17,363	7,929	8,182	328	1,298,636
Percentage	100.00%	1.32%	0.60%	0.62%	0.02%	98.68%

Source: Statistics Canada. (2022). Table 33-10-0631-01 Private enterprises by sex and Indigenous identity of ownership, province or region and enterprise size

**Table 6: Self-employment by Indigenous Identity, Canada, 2021**

	Total	Indigenous	First Nations	Inuit	Métis	Non-Indigenous
Total	2,981,535	84,445	43,520	1245	38,305	2,897,095
Percentage	100.00%	2.83%	1.46%	0.04%	1.28%	97.17%

Source: Self-Employment. ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_12), 2021 Census of Population.

Indigenous entrepreneurs and Indigenous-owned businesses provide meaningful economic contributions to all sectors and industries for a combined contribution of roughly \$48.9 billion annually.<sup>97</sup> The Indigenous Institute claims that the Indigenous business economy could soar to \$100 billion annually<sup>98</sup> if the systemic barriers to Indigenous entrepreneurship, such as the administrative burden of procurement processes, are removed. There are several studies and reports that quantify the number of

<sup>96</sup>This number has been referenced by several sources: Canadian Council for Indigenous Business. (N/A). *Industry Focus*.; Daly, J. (2023, July 31). *Building trust with Indigenous businesses*. Export Development Canada.; National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2022, July 8). *Defining Indigenous Businesses in Canada*.

<sup>97</sup> Ayotte, C., & Jeremy, B. (2022). *Indigenous Peoples Economic Account*. Statistics Canada

<sup>98</sup> Indigenous Institute. *100 Billion*.

Indigenous businesses in specific regions and provide estimates related to their economic impact. Below is a summary of these findings:

- In the Atlantic region, a report published by Group Consulting Inc. surveyed approximately 300 Indigenous businesses and found that those businesses spend as much as \$66 million annually on goods and services used as inputs.<sup>99</sup> Total direct spending from the Atlantic economy totaled \$1.1 billion, which contributed just over \$1 billion in GDP in the Atlantic region and 1.3 billion to Canada's GDP.<sup>100</sup>
- In Manitoba, a report published by the Southern Chiefs Organization found there to be 706 Indigenous business, totaling just over \$6 billion in spending, and contributing \$1.1 billion to Manitoba's GDP.<sup>101</sup> Of those total Indigenous businesses, 87 were in the north and 619 in the south, totaling \$532.8 million and \$5.4 billion in spending and contributing \$65.7 million and \$1 billion to GDP, respectively. Moreover, of those total Indigenous businesses, 543 were off reserve and 163 were on reserve, totaling \$1.2 billion and \$4.7 billion in spending.<sup>102</sup>
- In a benchmark study done by MNP Accounting in Calgary, Indigenous-owned businesses in Calgary and Treaty 7 First Nations lands were estimated to have generated \$552 million in revenue in 2021/22.<sup>103</sup> About 60% came from Indigenous-owned businesses in Calgary. The total spending of Indigenous-owned businesses in Calgary was estimated to have generated approximately \$290 million in total GDP, \$170 million in labour income, and 2,300 in total employment of full-time equivalents (FTEs).
- In British Columbia, a report prepared for the BC Assembly of First Nations estimated First Nations-owned businesses in BC generated approximately \$4.0 billion in revenue in 2021, of which approximately two-thirds was estimated to be generated on reserve.<sup>104</sup> The total spending of First Nations-owned businesses was estimated to have generated \$6 billion in total output and \$2.9 billion in total GDP, \$1.7 billion in total labour income, and approximate employment of 31,000 FTEs.

## Gender-Specific Data on Indigenous-owned Businesses

Indigenous women are more likely than non-Indigenous women to pursue entrepreneurship, with 40% of Indigenous self-employed workers being women, and 36% of non-Indigenous Canadian self-employed workers being women.<sup>105</sup> In 2018, approximately a quarter of Indigenous-owned businesses in Canada were owned by women.<sup>106</sup> Indigenous businesswomen in Alberta, surveyed by the IBC described themselves as resilient, resourceful, impactful, and influential. They feel a sense of achievement for their

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<sup>99</sup> Group ATN Consulting Inc. (2016). *\$1.14 Billion Strong: Indigenous Economic Performance in Atlantic Canada*. Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs Secretariat.

<sup>100</sup> Atlantic here includes Quebec. Moreover, no GDP impact numbers reported for Indigenous businesses.

<sup>101</sup> Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak, Southern Chief Organization, & Rural Development Institute. (2016). *Indigenous contributions to the Manitoba economy*.

<sup>102</sup> No impact to Manitoba's GDP reported.

<sup>103</sup> Calgary Economic Development, City of Calgary, & MNP LLP. (2023). *Indigenous Economic Contribution Study*.

<sup>104</sup> BC Assembly of First Nations. (2021). *Economic Participation and Contributions of First Nations in BC*.

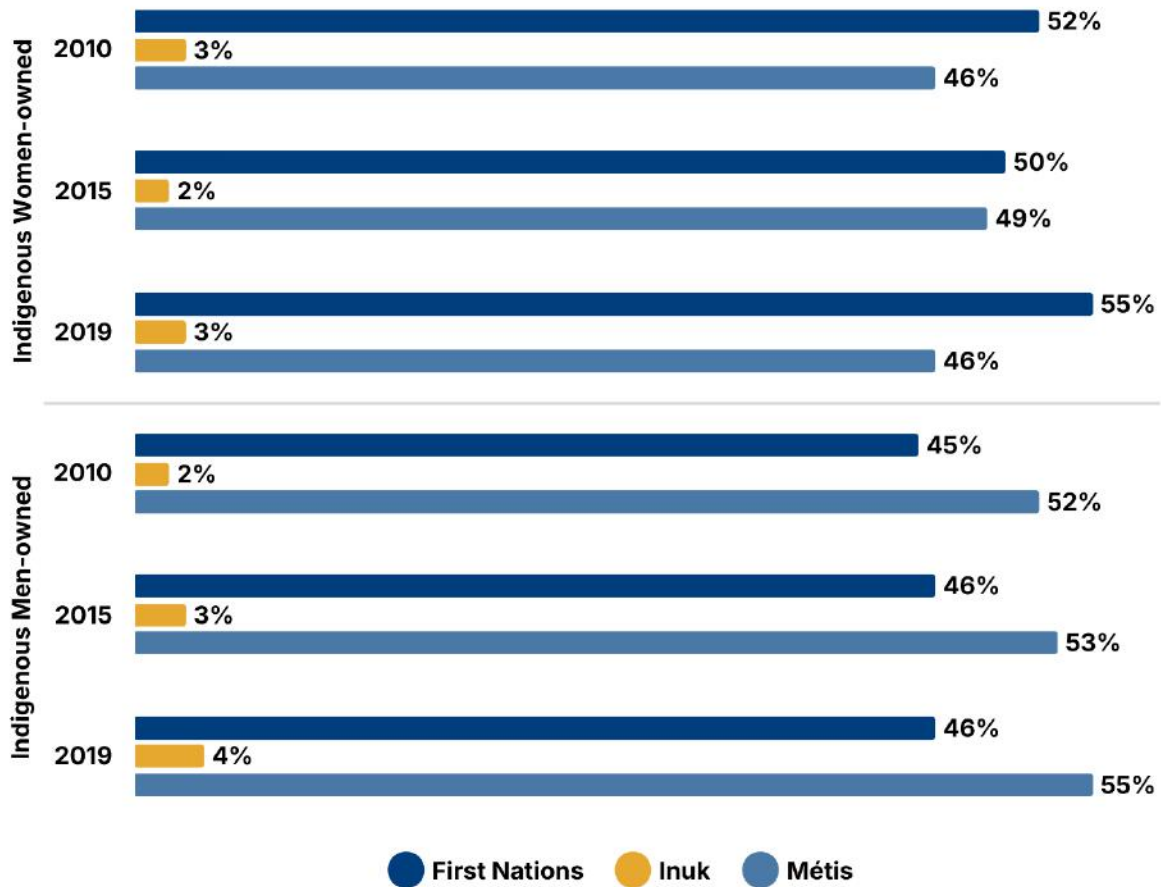
<sup>105</sup> Jakobsh, K. & Boskov, S. (2020). *Breaking Barriers: A decade of Indigenous women's entrepreneurship in Canada*. Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business.

<sup>106</sup> Statistics Canada. (2023, June 21). *Indigenous-owned businesses in Canada, 2018*.

entrepreneurship and believe that they are a vital example for family and community members and create employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for others.<sup>107</sup>

Figure 49: Indigenous-Owned Businesses by Identity Group and Gender, 2010, 2015 and 2019, Canada

## Indigenous-Owned Businesses by Identity Group and Gender, 2010, 2015 and 2019

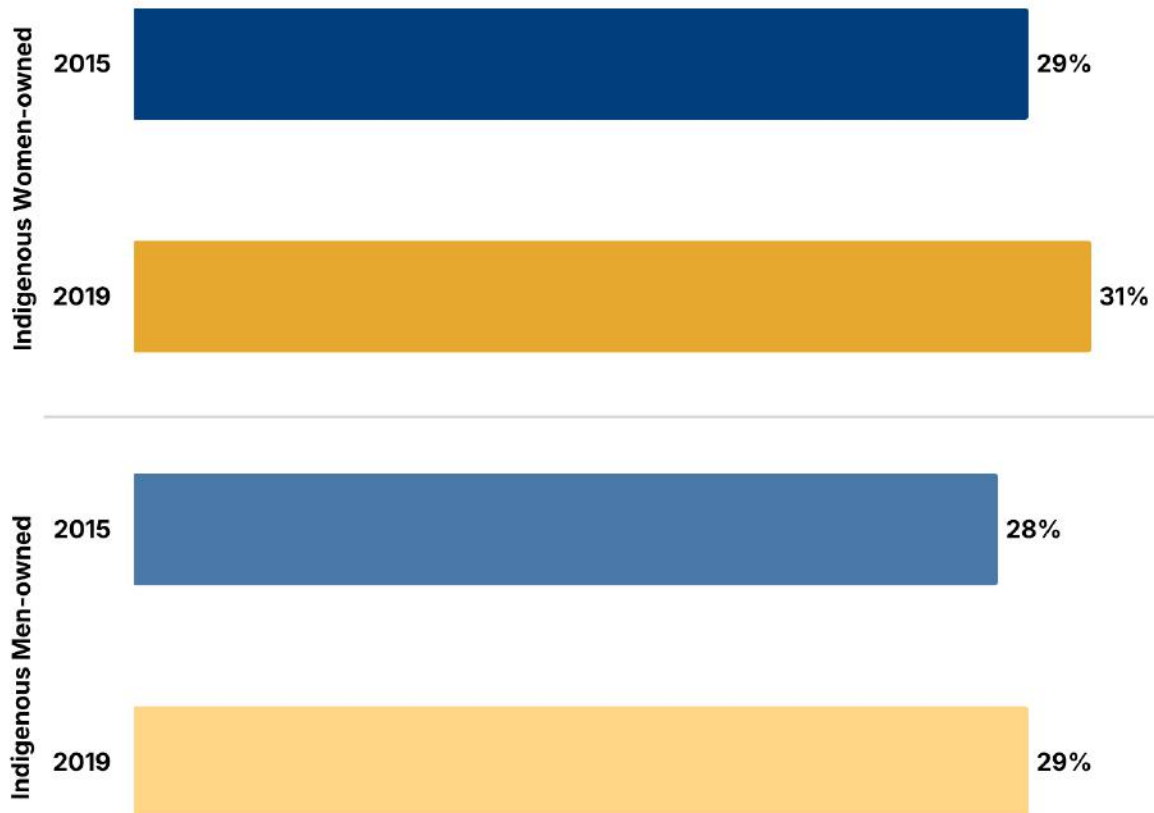


Source: Jakobsh, K. & Boskov, S. (2020). *Breaking Barriers: A decade of Indigenous women's entrepreneurship in Canada*. Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business.

<sup>107</sup> Indian Business Corporation. (N/A). *Indigenous Business Women*.

Figure 50: Indigenous-Owned Businesses Located on Reserve by Gender, 2015 and 2019, Canada

## Indigenous-Owned Businesses Located on Reserve by Gender, 2015 and 2019



Source: Jakobsh, K. & Boskov, S. (2020). *Breaking Barriers: A decade of Indigenous women's entrepreneurship in Canada*. Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business.

### Characteristics of Indigenous Women-owned Businesses

According to the CCIB *Breaking Barriers* study, Indigenous women-owned businesses tend to be smaller than their men-owned counterparts. Certain characteristics illustrate this difference, notably that 60% of Indigenous women-owned businesses are sole proprietorships (60%), compared to 48% of Indigenous men-owned businesses. Similarly, the incorporation rate of Indigenous women-owned businesses was 21% in 2019, whereas Indigenous men-owned businesses' is 30% and non-Indigenous women-owned businesses' is 26%. Additionally, Indigenous women-owned businesses operate without employees at a rate of 58%, but only 45% of Indigenous men owned businesses operate without employees.

Indigenous women-owned businesses reach \$1 million in annual revenue at half the rate of Indigenous men-owned businesses, specifically with 9% of Indigenous women-owned businesses reaching that threshold and 18% of Indigenous men-owned businesses reaching it. That being said, Indigenous women-

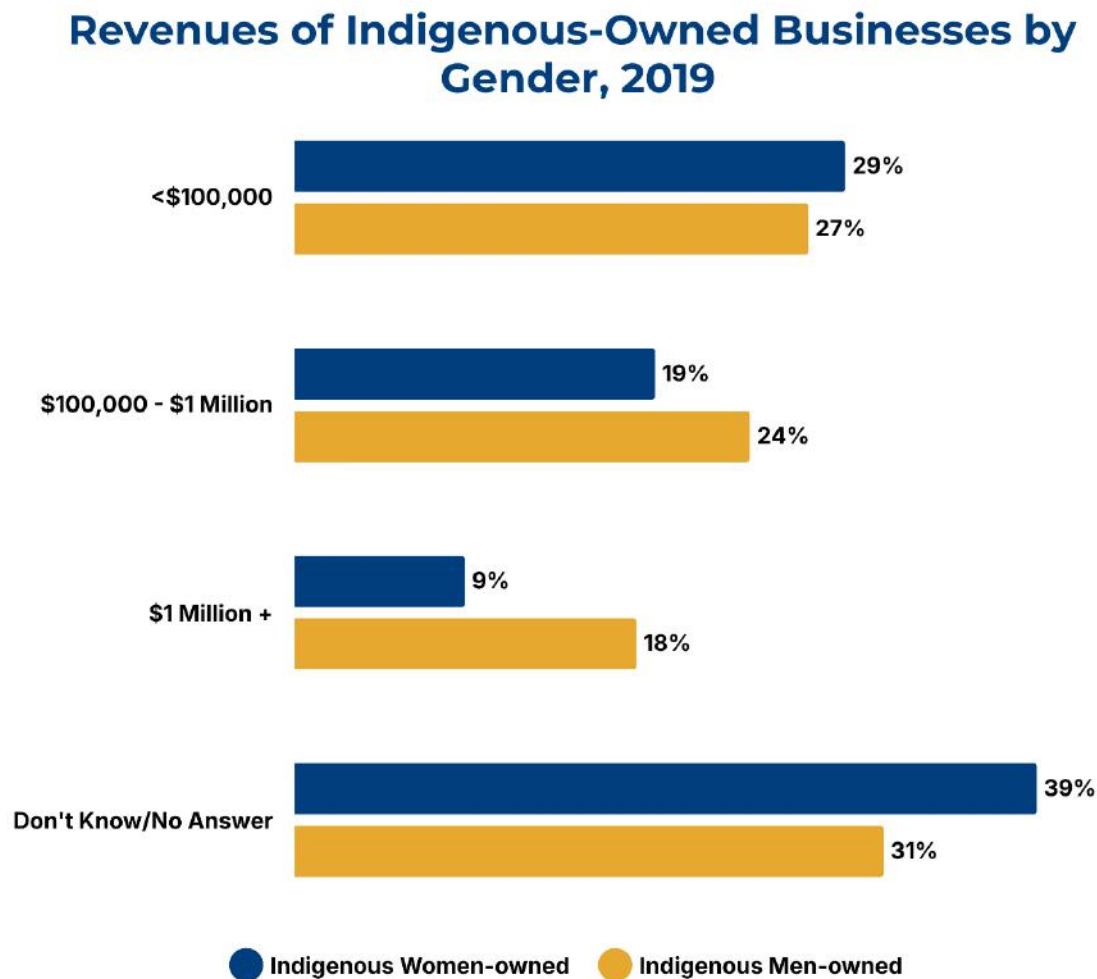


owned businesses are more likely than their male counterparts to be innovative by introducing new products and services (47% versus 41%) and new processes (34% versus 31%).<sup>108</sup>

### Obstacles Faced by Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs

Indigenous women entrepreneurs face many challenges when starting a business, including a lack of access to financing, the need to balance business, family, and community responsibilities, sexism, gender bias, and in many cases, the *Indian Act*. Additionally, Indigenous women have a lower average income than Indigenous men, as illustrated in Figure 51, meaning that a higher proportion of their income often comes from government transfers. This contributes to low savings and equity, which are required to invest in starting a business.<sup>109</sup>

**Figure 51: Revenues of Indigenous-Owned Businesses by Gender, 2019, Canada**



Source: Jakobsh, K. & Boskov, S. (2020). *Breaking Barriers: A decade of Indigenous women's entrepreneurship in Canada*. Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business.

<sup>108</sup> Jakobsh, K. & Boskov, S. (2020). *Breaking Barriers: A decade of Indigenous women's entrepreneurship in Canada*. Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business.

<sup>109</sup> Bobiwash, H. (2020). *Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs in Canada: Summary of Literature Review*. National Aboriginal Capital Corporations.

Access to financing is a heightened barrier amongst Indigenous women entrepreneurs as compared to Indigenous men. In 2020, 33% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs in Ontario reported access to financing as an obstacle for entrepreneurship, compared with 30% of men. In Ontario, 37% of Indigenous women reported access to equity and capital as an obstacle, whereas only 23% men reported the same.

According to the CCIB survey results in Ontario in 2020, Indigenous women-owned businesses were less likely to report a net profit, at a rate of 55%, versus 63% for Indigenous men-owned businesses. Furthermore, 17% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs ran band-owned businesses in 2020, compared to 12% of Indigenous men entrepreneurs, and band-owned businesses are less likely to turn a profit.

Internet and IT infrastructure also create challenges for Indigenous women entrepreneurs in Ontario, who reported issues at a rate of 38% in 2020, as compared to a rate of 23% among Indigenous men. Similarly, 65% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs in Ontario used high-speed internet in 2020, but 74% of Indigenous men used it. Other infrastructure challenges also presented themselves in 2020 in Ontario, where 30% of Indigenous women reported obstacles with electricity, water, and roads, compared to 21% for men. Geographic location was also reported as an obstacle by 35% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs in Ontario, but by only 21% of Indigenous men entrepreneurs.<sup>110</sup>

The IBC surveyed businesswomen in Alberta, of which one third responded that, to own a small business, they had to overcome adversity, discrimination, and racism from employers, customers, the bank, the band office, or the inter-tribal council. One quarter of respondents also referred to overt sexism as a challenge to starting their business.<sup>111</sup>

#### COVID-19 Impact on Indigenous Women-owned Businesses

The COVID-19 pandemic affected all businesses, as was discussed in greater detail throughout other chapters of this report, but certain impacts were reported by women-owned businesses at higher rates than men-owned businesses. For example, 45% of women-owned businesses reported experiencing pressure to find new ways of providing goods or services, versus 36% of men-owned businesses. Women-owned businesses also reported additional personal debt at a rate of 41%, versus 34% for men-owned businesses, and unreliable internet causing disruptions for remote workers or e-commerce at a rate of 41%, versus 34% for their male counterparts. Women-owned businesses were also more likely to report temporary closure (42% of women-owned businesses versus 33% of men owned businesses).

Considering the fact that men-owned businesses are more likely to have employees, they were more likely than women-owned businesses to report staff layoffs (51% versus 43%). However, 43% of Indigenous women-owned businesses also laid off staff either temporarily (32%) or permanently (11%) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In January 2021, men and women business owners reported similar business survival rates based on how long they expected their business to survive without further supports.

In January 2021, 51% of Indigenous women-owned businesses said they needed up to \$50,000 in financial assistance to survive the next six months. However, among men-owned businesses, 38% indicated

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<sup>110</sup> Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2020). *Promise and Prosperity: The 2020 Ontario Aboriginal Business Survey*.

<sup>111</sup> Indian Business Corporation. (N/A). *Indigenous Business Women*.

needing this amount of financial assistance. Approximately one quarter (23%) of Indigenous women-owned businesses indicated needing more than \$50,000 to survive.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous women-owned businesses were less likely than their male counterparts to have lending relationships with Aboriginal Financial Institutions, at a rate of 25% compared to 32% for Indigenous men-owned businesses. Similar gaps were identified with regard to large financial institutions, where 21% of Indigenous women-owned businesses had a lending relationship compared to 34% of Indigenous men-owned businesses. These gaps contributed to limiting women entrepreneurs' ability to access capital during the pandemic.<sup>112</sup>

- Indigenous women-owned businesses reach \$1 million in annual revenue at half the rate of Indigenous men-owned businesses (9% for women versus 18% for men).
- Access to financing is a heightened barrier for Indigenous women entrepreneurs, with 33% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs in Ontario reporting it as an obstacle in 2020, compared with 30% of men.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indigenous women-owned businesses were less likely than their male counterparts to have lending relationships with Aboriginal Financial Institutions (25% for women versus 32% for men).

## Indigenous Self-employment

Indigenous self-employment has been a useful indicator for the *IEPR* and has been cited in all iterations. The indicator is used to measure the level of Indigenous entrepreneurship in Canada, specifically Sole-Entrepreneurship of Indigenous Peoples in comparison to non-Indigenous peoples.

As of 2021, the percentage of self-employed Indigenous Peoples was 9.8%, up from 7.4% in the 2016 Census and 6.8% in the 2006 Census (Figure 52). This trend has caused a reduction in the Indigenous to non-Indigenous self-employment gap from -5.2% in 2006 to -4.9% in 2021. However, this gap has increased from the 2016 Census where it was at -4.3%. This increase in the gap was largely because of the much higher increase in self-employment from non-Indigenous peoples where the percentage increased by a larger margin compared to Indigenous Peoples (3% and 2.4%).

The 2019 *IEPR* found the gap in self-employment to have narrowed since the first report due to increasing trends in the percentage of self-employed individuals amongst the Indigenous population, which at the time, was greater than the non-Indigenous population. However, in the 2021 Census that progress appears to have reversed and widened to 4.9 percentage points, which is very close to its initial level at 5.1 percent in the 2006 Census. This was largely due to the large widening of the gaps amongst the Inuit and on-reserve First Nation Peoples.

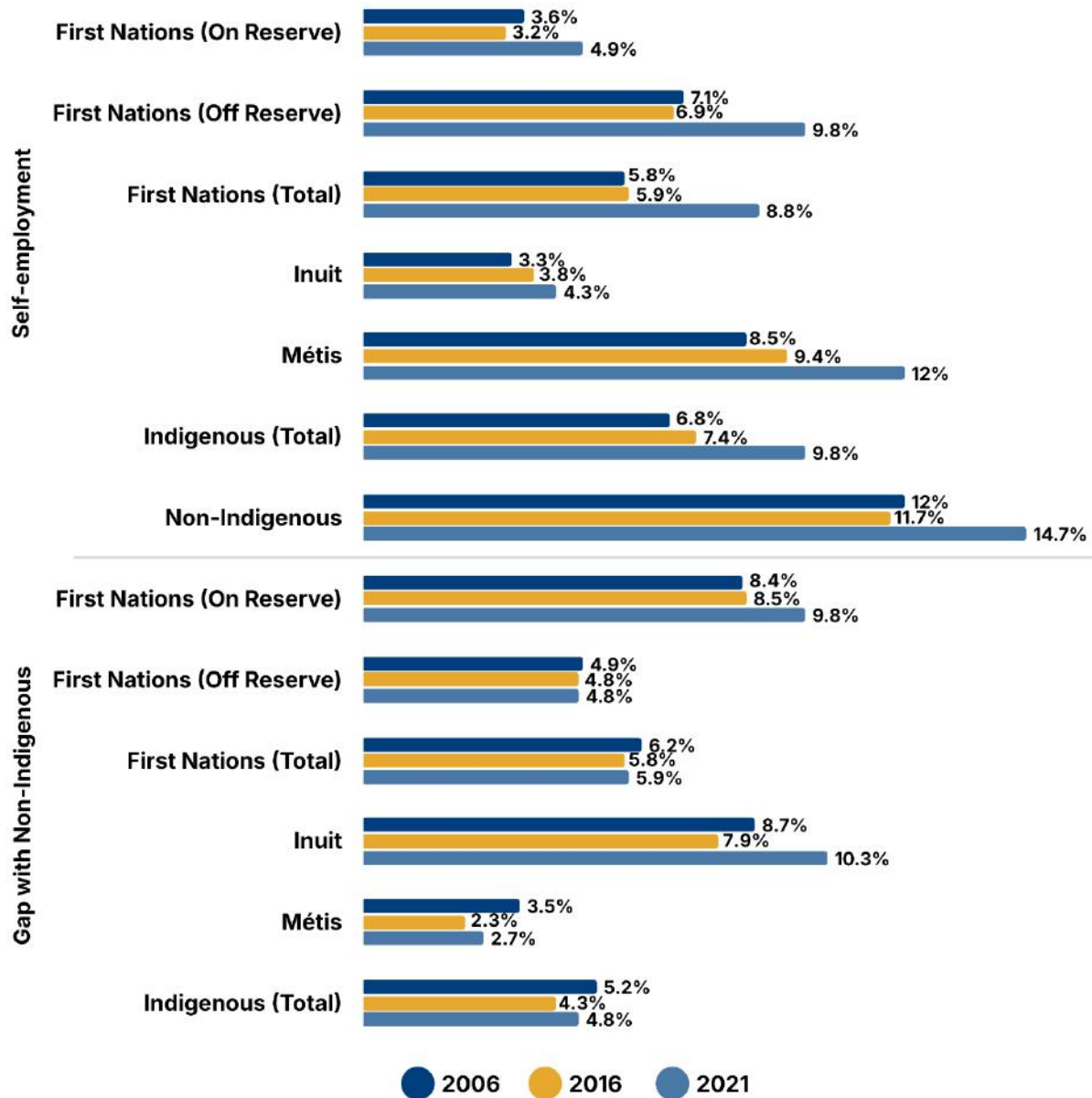
Within the identity groups, Métis exhibit the highest level of self-employment at 12%, followed by First Nations off-reserve at 9.8%. Inuit exhibit the lowest percentage of self-employment rates at 4.3%

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<sup>112</sup> Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2021). *COVID-19 Indigenous Business Survey - Phase II: Indigenous Women Entrepreneurs*.

Figure 52: Percent of Workers who are Self-Employed by Identity Group, 2006, 2016, and 2021, Canada

## Percent of Workers who are Self-Employed by Identity Group, 2006, 2016, and 2021



Source: Self-Employment. ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_12), 2021 Census of Population.

### Indigenous Business by Firm Size

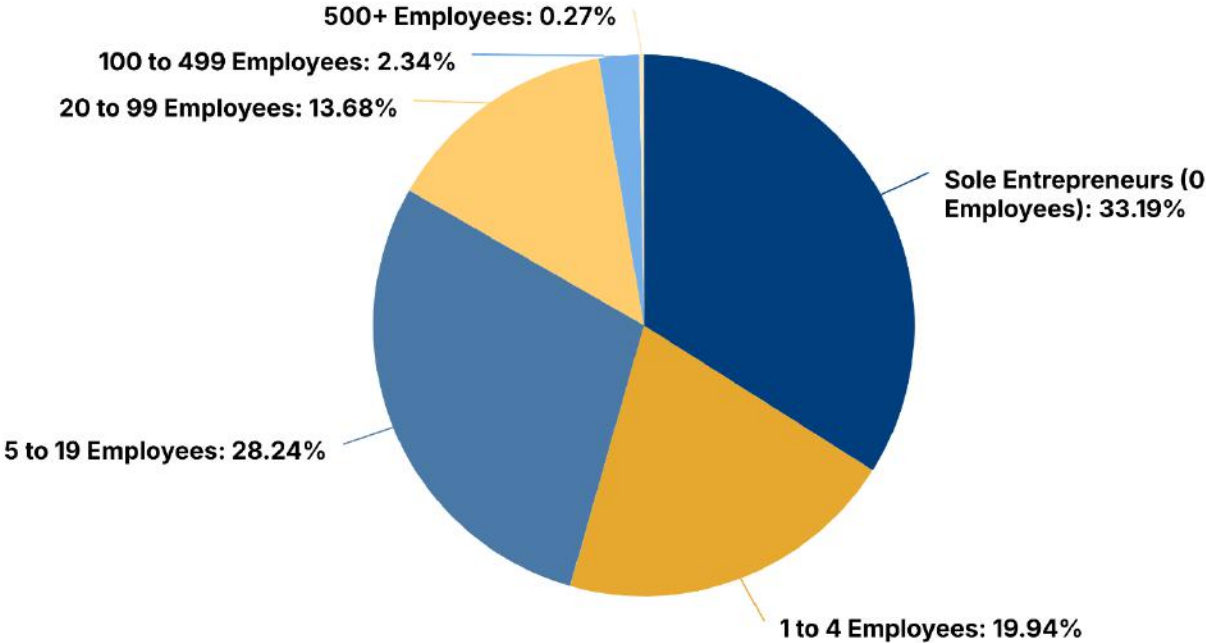
Previous iterations of the *IEPR* completed by the NIEDB did not use firm size for Indigenous-owned businesses as an indicator, however it is now viewed as a useful measure to review. To estimate the distribution of firm size for Indigenous-owned businesses in Canada, this report uses data obtained from two different surveys: the *Survey of Indigenous Firms* from CCIB and Global Affairs Canada and the *Survey*

on *Financing and Growth of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises* from Statistics Canada. The former gives information from a sample of Indigenous firms with a firm size ranging from sole entrepreneurs, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (firms with 1-499 employees), and large firms with 500 plus employees. The latter survey provides a sample of information for SMEs only. Both surveys break down SMEs into firms with 1 to 4 employees, 5 to 19 employees, 20 to 99 employees, and 100 to 499 employees.

Figure 53 compares the size distribution of Indigenous-owned firms in 2021. Sole entrepreneurs represented the largest share of Indigenous firms, representing 33.19% of all firms. 28.24% of Indigenous firms had 5 to 19 employees, 19.94% had 1 to 4 employees, 13.68% had 20 to 99 employees, 2.34% had 100 to 499 employees, and 0.27% had 500 plus employees. Moreover, this shows that the majority of Indigenous firms have very few employees or none at all, with more than half the distribution coming from sole entrepreneurs and firms with 1 to 4 employees.

**Figure 53: Percent of Indigenous Businesses by Firm Size, 2021, Canada**

### Percent of Indigenous Businesses by Firm Size, 2021

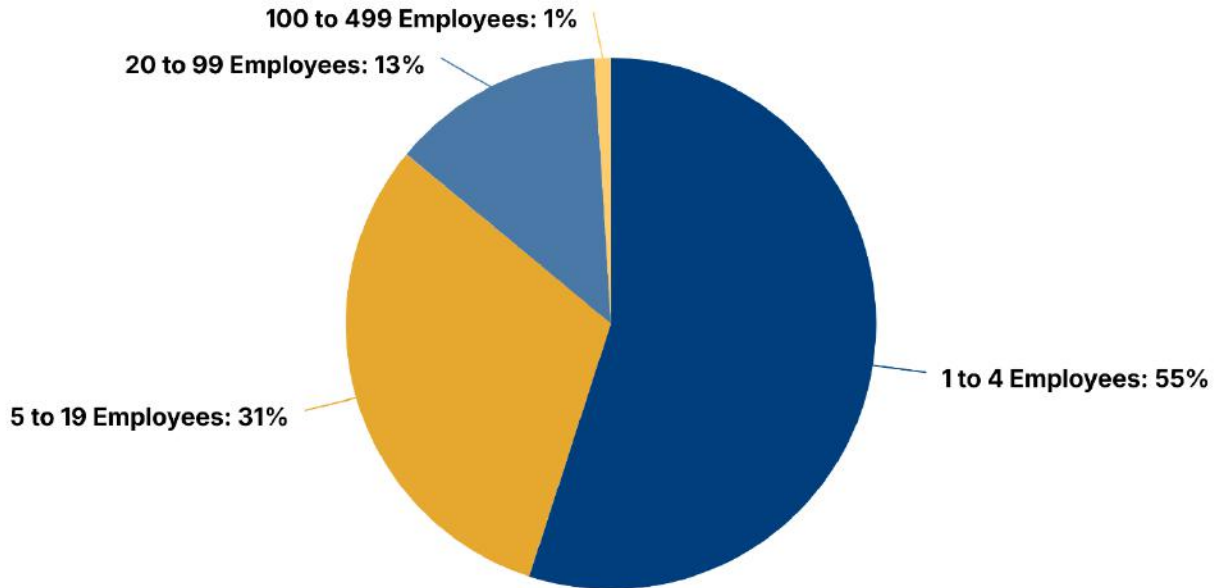


Source: Global Affairs Canada & Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2021). *Survey of Indigenous Firms*.

Figure 54 compares the size distribution of Indigenous-owned SMEs in 2020. The majority of Indigenous-owned SMEs had between 1 to 4 employees at 55%, whereas 31% had 5 to 19 employees, 13% had 20 to 99 employees, and 1% had 100 to 499 employees.

Figure 54: Percent of Indigenous-Owned SMEs by Firm Size, 2020, Canada

## Percent of Indigenous-Owned SMEs by Firm Size, 2020

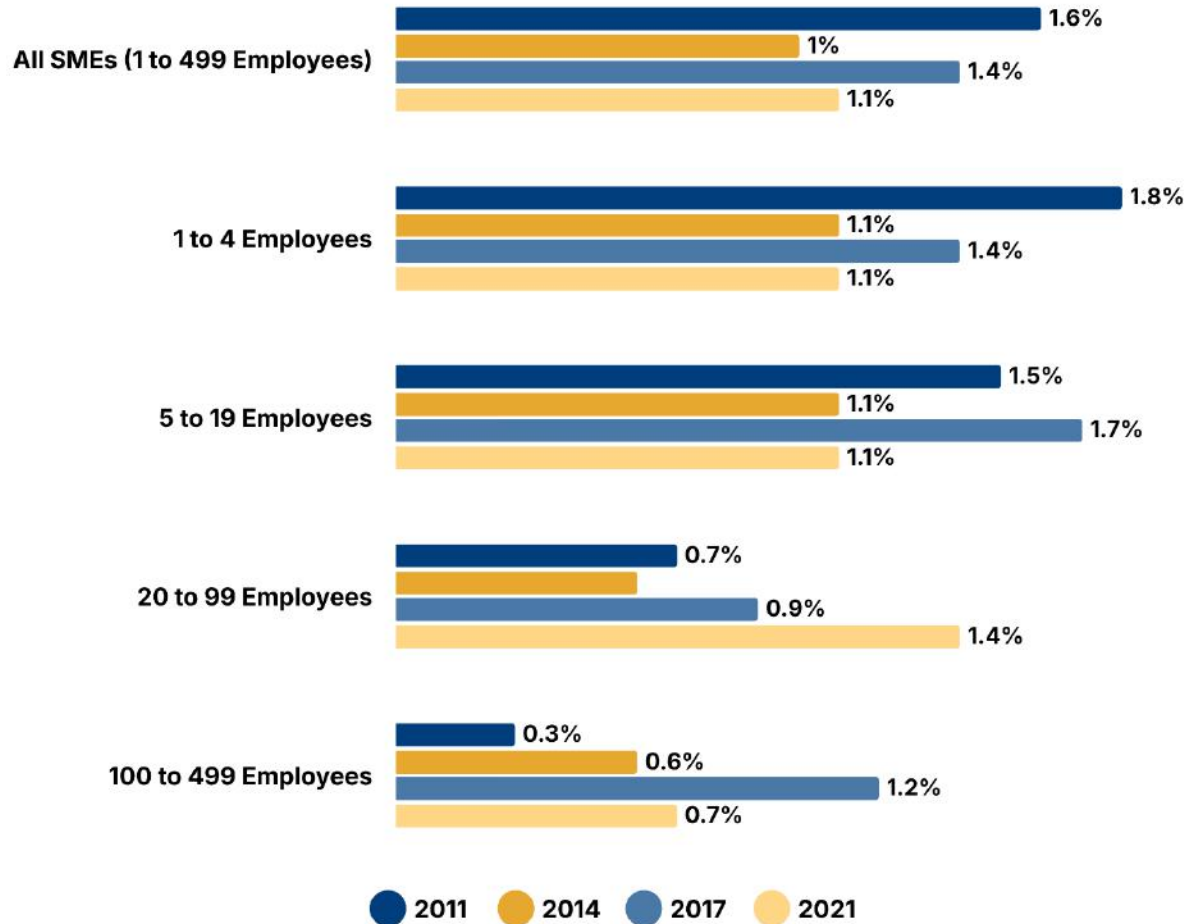


Source: Survey on Financing and Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises, 2020

Figure 55 compares the percentage of all SMEs that are Indigenous owned from 2011 to 2020. Over the years, the percentage of Canadian SMEs that are Indigenous-owned has varied but has consistently hovered below the 2% range. In 2011, 1.6% of all SMEs were Indigenous owned, whereas in 2021, the percentage dropped down to 1.1%. This same trend is observed for firms with 1 to 4 employees and 5 to 19 employees. On the positive side, the percentage of Indigenous-owned SMEs with 20 to 99 employees is increasing over the years, going from 0.7% to 1.1% of all SMEs. The same trend is observed from 2011 to 2017 for SMEs with 100 to 499 employees, going from 0.3% to 1.2% of all SMEs, but this dropped considerably in 2020 to 0.7%.

Figure 55: Percent of SMEs with Majority Indigenous Ownership by Firm Size, 2011 to 2020, Canada

## Percent of SMEs with Majority Indigenous Ownership by Firm Size, 2011 to 2020



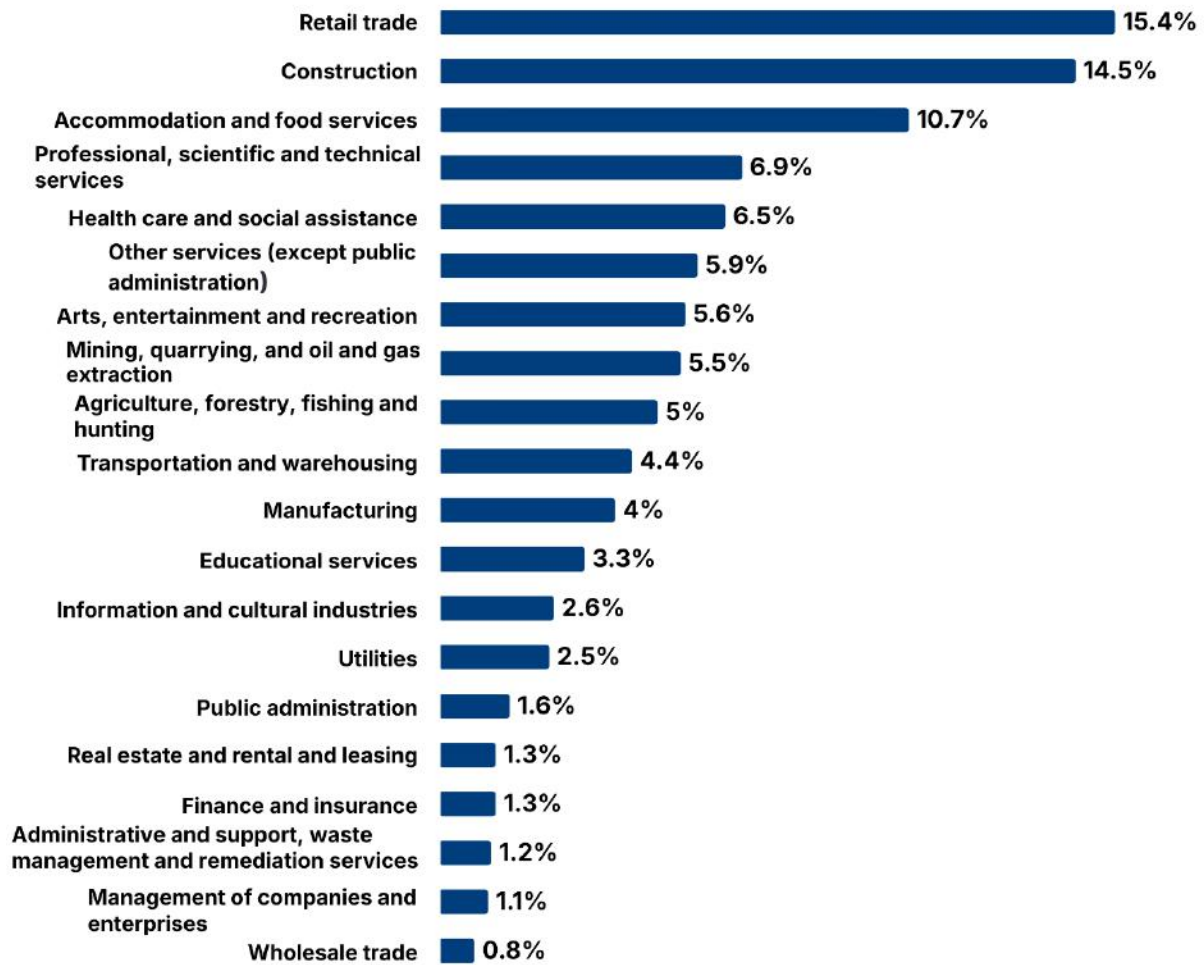
Source: Survey on Financing and Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises, 2020

## Indigenous Business by Industry

Indigenous businesses contribute to various sectors and industries of the Canadian economy and contribute to the international economy with many industries exporting out of Canada. This section utilizes the *Survey of Indigenous Firms* to compare the distribution of Indigenous firms by industry and which industries are more likely to export. Figure 56 compares the estimated distribution of Indigenous-owned businesses by industry in Canada in 2021. Of all Indigenous owned businesses in Canada, Indigenous businesses are heavily concentrated in the retail trade, construction, and accommodation and food services industries representing 15.4%, 14.5%, and 10.7% of Indigenous businesses respectively. Moreover, more than 50% of all Indigenous-owned businesses are heavily concentrated in five industries alone (the above-noted industries with the addition of professional, scientific, and technical services).

Figure 56: Percent of Indigenous Businesses by Industry, 2021, Canada

## Percent of Indigenous Businesses by Industry, 2021

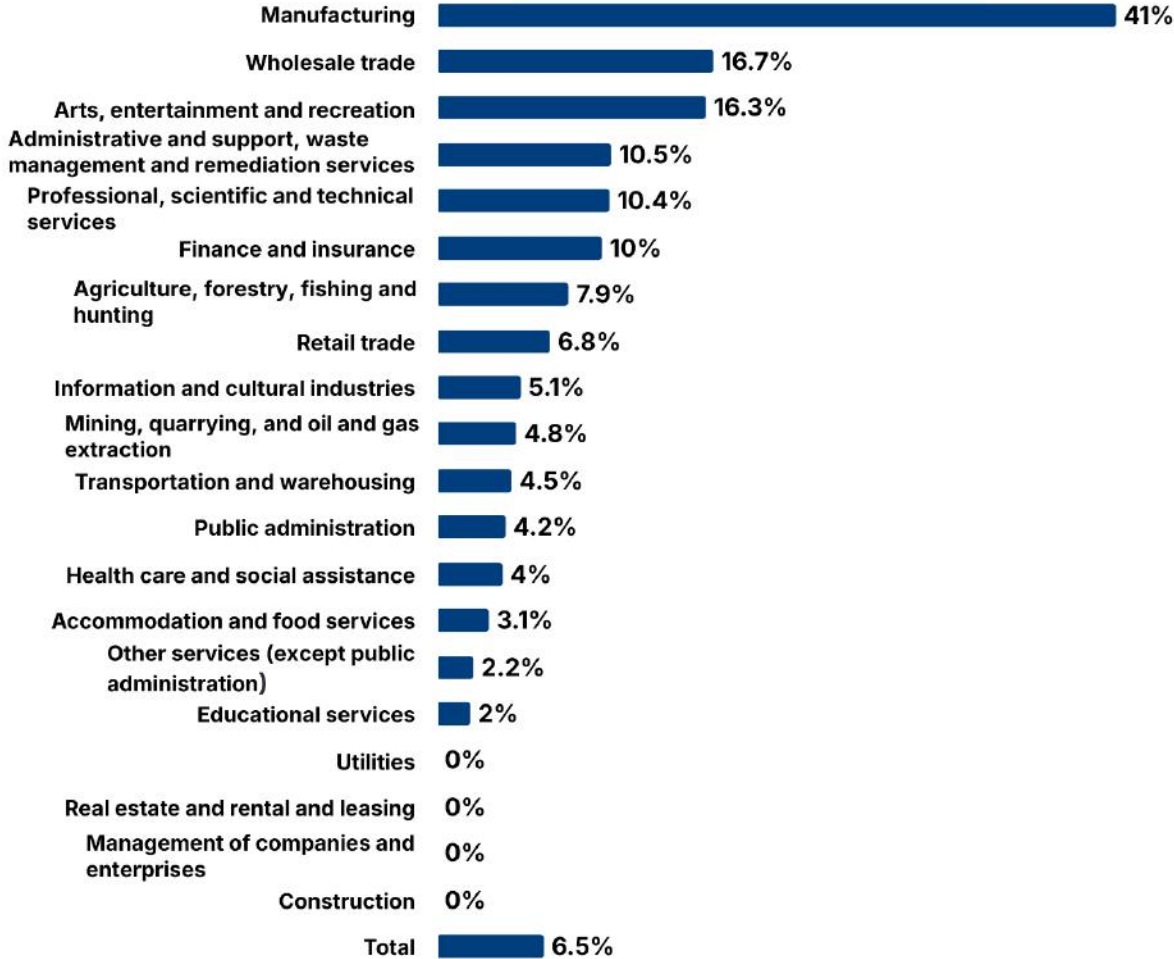


Source: Global Affairs Canada & Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2021). Survey of Indigenous Firms.



Figure 57: Percent of Indigenous-Owned Businesses Exporting out of Canada by Industry, 2021

## Percent of Indigenous-Owned Businesses Exporting out of Canada by Industry, 2021



Source: Global Affairs Canada & Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2021). Survey of Indigenous Firms.

Figure 57 compares the distribution of Indigenous-owned businesses who export out of Canada by industry in 2021. Indigenous-owned businesses in the manufacturing industry are much more likely to export, where an estimated 41% of Indigenous-owned business operate in that industry export. The industries with the highest percentage of Indigenous-owned businesses who export are manufacturing (41 %), wholesale trade (16.7 %), arts and entertainment (16.3%), administrative and support, waste management and remediation services (10.5 %), and recreation, professional, scientific, and technical services (10.4%).

The impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on Indigenous-owned businesses that export out of Canada has many different aspects. A study conducted by the CCIB and the Office of the Chief Economist of Global Affairs Canada (GAC) in 2023 aimed to better understand the Indigenous economy in Canada, including the barriers to expansion. The report found that NAFTA allowed Indigenous-owned SME export activity “to primarily remain focused on the U.S. and, to a lesser extent, European

markets. However, there is a strikingly high interest in Oceanic markets (i.e., Australia and New Zealand), considering they are not among Canada’s main export markets. These markets were named both as top current export markets (Australia was the third most popular market after the U.S. and the United Kingdom) and targeted markets for expansion by the Indigenous SMEs surveyed. This may be due to an interest in those markets for Indigenous products or in establishing Indigenous-to-Indigenous business partnerships.”

In terms of additional figures, SMEs that do not currently export are over 4 times more likely to report plans to start exporting (16.3%) compared to the Canadian SME average (3.8%). The report also found geography to play a key role in Indigenous firms’ export activities. Indigenous SMEs located in remote regions experience 65% lower odds of exporting compared to urban-based Indigenous SMEs. This may be a result of infrastructure gaps (both physical and digital) or the great distance to international markets that many Indigenous entrepreneurs based in remote areas contend with.<sup>113</sup>

To a lesser degree, being in an Indigenous community (e.g., on reserve) was associated with a 42% reduction in the odds of exporting. However, e-commerce can help Indigenous firms mitigate these and other factors. Virtual sales were associated with 6 times higher odds of exporting.

While NAFTA had positive effects on Indigenous communities, such as the ease of embarking on an export journey and facilitating export activities, it also led to disparities, cultural erosion, and some environmental concerns. The new trade agreement, known as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), aims to address some of these concerns, by preserving pre-existing carve-outs affecting Indigenous Peoples, including preferential treatment for state-owned enterprises purchasing goods and services from Indigenous-owned businesses.<sup>114</sup> It remains essential to continue monitoring and supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs as they navigate global trade opportunities.<sup>115</sup>

## Indigenous Business by Firm Profit and Revenue

Indigenous entrepreneurship and businesses have significant economic impacts on the Canadian economy, driven in part by growth in sales and revenues. This section uses the *Survey on Financing and Growth of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises* to analyze growth in sales and revenues by Indigenous-owned SMEs. Figure 58 illustrates the distribution of growth in sales and revenues for majority owned Indigenous businesses in comparison to all SMEs in Canada over the last three years from 2020. A larger percentage of majority-owned Indigenous business show growth of 20% or more per year compared to all SMEs. Twenty percent of all majority Indigenous owned businesses saw growth of 20% or more per year over the last three years whereas only 7% of all SMEs saw this level of growth. Additionally, 2.7% of majority-owned Indigenous businesses and all SMEs saw growth between 16% and 19% per year over the last three years.

A smaller percentage of majority-owned Indigenous businesses experience no growth or negative growth in comparison to all SMEs. 15.8% and 17.5% of majority owned Indigenous businesses experienced no

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<sup>113</sup> Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business & Global Affairs Canada. (2023). *Adàwe: export experiences of Indigenous entrepreneurs*.

<sup>114</sup> Barrera, J. (2018, October 1). *New trade agreement a 'step up' from NAFTA on Indigenous rights*. CBC News.

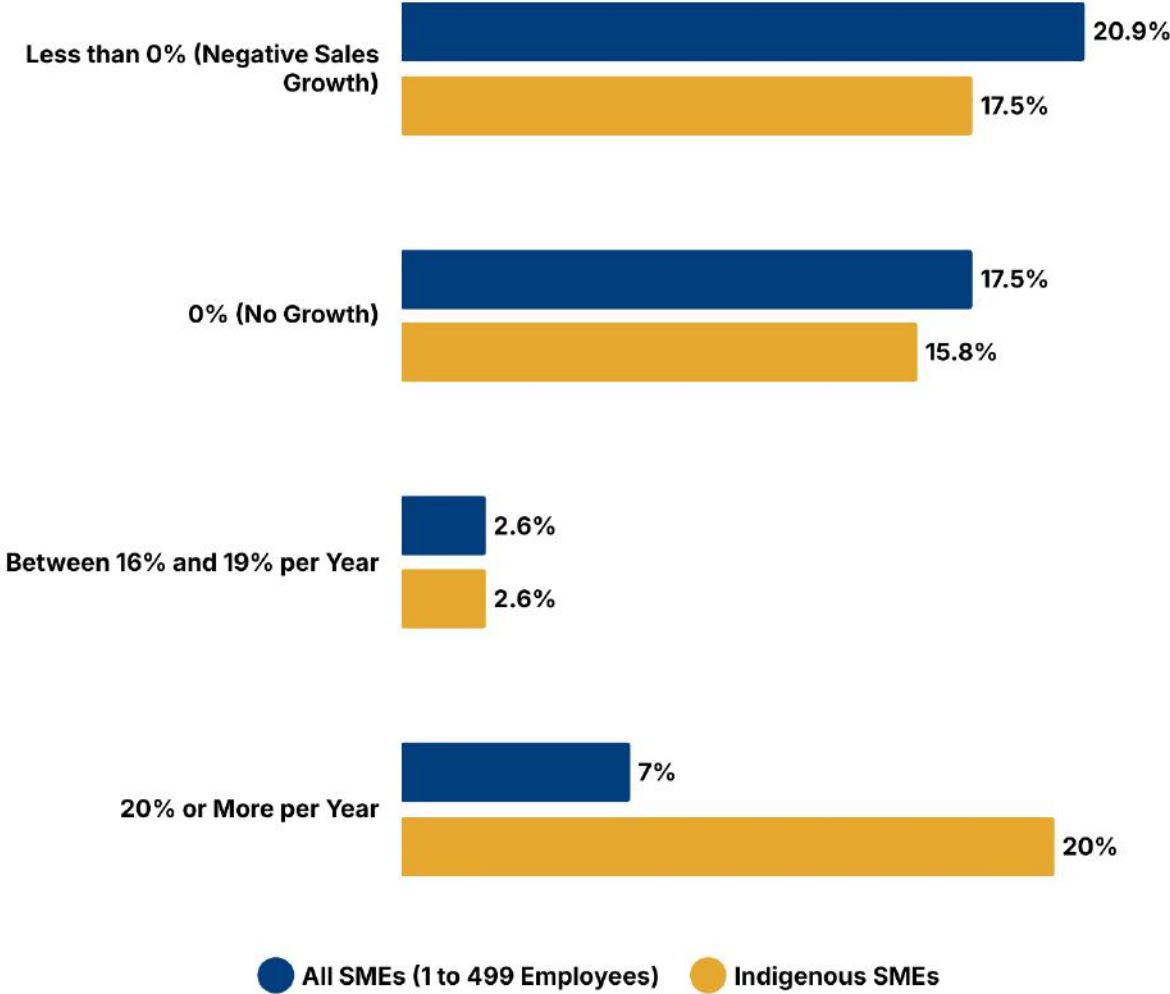
<sup>115</sup> Evans, T. (2022, June 6). *How Indigenous businesses are taking on the world*. Economic Development Canada.

growth and negative growth over the last three years, whereas 17.5% and 20.9% of all SMEs experienced no growth and negative growth over the years.

This demonstrates that Indigenous SMEs appear to be outperforming the rest of SMEs in Canada in growth of sales and revenues.

**Figure 58: Percent Average Yearly Growth in Sales and Revenues for SMEs (Last Three Years) by Majority Indigenous Ownership, 2020, Canada**

### Percent Average Yearly Growth in Sales and Revenues for SMEs (Last Three Years) by Majority Indigenous Ownership, 2020



Source: Survey on Financing and Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises, 2020

### Conclusion

In response to the data depicted throughout this chapter, it is clear that access to business services and skills training, as well as other funding supports and programs, are needed to boost the number of

Indigenous entrepreneurs in the Canadian economy. The creation of easy to access platforms to navigate the range of resources available for entrepreneurs and promoting these platforms is essential to remove the barriers to accessing entrepreneurial opportunities for Indigenous individuals. Furthermore, those who have made successful business endeavors in the Indigenous entrepreneurial space may share their best practices in support of new entrepreneurs by way of websites or brochures, making helpful tips accessible to individuals.

Real progress has been made in this area, however the 2019 *IEPR* pointed to the need for a major overhaul of the way government addresses Indigenous economic development. Research by the CCIB suggests that barriers for business development include a lack of knowledge of where and how to apply for financing, as well as types of funding available and eligibility criteria. Enhanced, more specific, and greater availability of business services, along with communications to increase awareness of application programs and support, would benefit entrepreneurs seeking capital financing. This chapter has demonstrated that access to financing is a heightened barrier for Indigenous women entrepreneurs with a greater need for financing.

Additionally, access to skills training for new business owners would assist with the development of business management skills to support business success.

This chapter also demonstrates that on-reserve businesses can greatly increase the number of successful Indigenous business endeavors, however systemic barriers inhibit this from happening. Current legislation on reserve does not allow tax exemption, thereby discouraging incorporation and inhibiting revenue generation. As was recommended in the 2019 *IEPR*, further consideration of better supports for First Nations on-reserve businesses should be examined.

It was also noted that access to capital for Indigenous businesses remains a barrier to meaningful economic development. It is essential that Aboriginal Financial Institutions are funded to ensure Indigenous entrepreneurs, often less likely to acquire financing from personal home equity or other sources, are able to obtain financing.

#### 2019 *IEPR* Entrepreneurship Recommendations

- ***Aboriginal Financial Institutions are funded to ensure Indigenous entrepreneurs are able to obtain financing.***  
***(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 5, 84, 92,93)***

#### 2024 *IEPR* Entrepreneurship Recommendations

- ***Enhance support for Indigenous businesses to expand into international markets, leveraging opportunities provided by trade agreements like the Indigenous Peoples Economic, Trade, and Cooperation Arrangement, the Canada United States Mexico Agreement, and other International trade agreements***
- ***Enhance the support structures for Indigenous entrepreneurs, including tailored financial support, access to markets, business support infrastructure, and regulatory and legal advice***

- ***Ensure that government programs and policy directives at all levels are easily accessible and understandable, making accessing funding and program benefits easier and more efficient to the recipient.***
- ***Require all employers, banks and investment/hiring organizations and institutions to complete anti-racism, anti-sexism, discrimination and bias prevention training***
- ***Develop websites, booklets, and/or other resources on best practices in supporting Indigenous entrepreneurship.***
- ***Ensure government and organization-wide adoption of Indigenous procurement strategies, including adopting the National Indigenous Procurement Working Group's definition of "Indigenous business" and ensure a more rigorous definition system is developed to mitigate against false claims of Indigeneity.***
- ***Devolve the oversight of Indigenous procurement strategies across government and private sector to Indigenous organizations***
- ***Support the development of Indigenous Chambers of Commerce***
- ***Support Indigenous Loan Guarantee Programs such as the one introduced in Budget 2024 and other provincial models.***

## UNDERLYING INDICATOR #3: GOVERNANCE

*“Colonization features the disempowerment of Indigenous Peoples and governments, through the Crown imposing and taking control. Addressing this legacy, which is at its heart what reconciliation is about, must involve removing Crown control and respecting the autonomy, authority, and jurisdiction of Indigenous Peoples and their governments.”*

– Jody Wilson-Raybould

### Governance Highlights

Indicators used to measure good governance for First Nations in the previous progress reports have been: number of communities with a First Nations Community Intervention Status, number of First Nations with Property Taxation Status and the number of First Nations with Financial Management Certification. Indicators for governance applicable to Métis and Inuit are under development. This iteration of the report reviews the number of Indigenous voices and representation in Canadian National Governance as a new measurement for benchmarking. As well, this report introduces tracking the Government of Canada’s implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan as new measurement for benchmarking that will be incorporated in the future progress reports.

#### First Nations Under Default Prevention and Management Policy

Since the 2019 Indigenous Economic Progress Report, there has been a 42.2% decrease in the average number of First Nations under the Default Prevention and Management Policy. As of December 2023, there were 65 First Nations under the Default Prevention and Management Policy with 29 in Recipient Managed, 34 in Recipient-Appointed Advisor and one in Third-Party Funding Management. This decrease is attributed to an interim directive to replace the policy, disallowing further application of the first two levels of default management.



#### First Nations Enacting Property Taxation By-Laws

There has been an 11.7% increase in the total number of First Nations enacting property taxation by-laws since 2018 from 154 to 172. First Nations are increasingly doing so under the First Nation Fiscal Management Act rather than under the Indian Act.



#### First Nations with Financial Management Certification

As of June 2024, there has been a 201% increase in the number of First Nations that are certified by the First Nations Financial Management Board since January 2018 from 101 to 238 First Nations.



#### Indigenous Voice and Representation in Canadian National Governance

- There has been a significant increase in the number of Indigenous Members of Parliament with an unprecedented 11 elected in 2015, including the first Indigenous Minister of Justice, Jody Wilson-Raybould. In 2019, 10 Indigenous Members of Parliament were elected, and in 2021 this number increased to 12.
- In August 2022, a milestone in Canadian Law was reached when Michelle O’Bonaswin became the first Indigenous person nominated to the Supreme Court of Canada.

## Introduction

Good governance plays a key role in creating the right structural conditions for economic development on reserve lands and for Indigenous identity groups. Identifying governance indicators has proven to be challenging given the variation in governance structures and systems that exist across and within Indigenous groups. Although many Indigenous communities have revitalized and uphold many of their traditional governance systems and decision-making processes, there is variability among communities.

This chapter will begin by providing an overview of Indigenous governance as a whole, including the different governing structures of Métis, Inuit, and First Nation Peoples. Then, the indicators of good governance will be reviewed, and data comparisons will be made between previous reports to highlight the progress made. Lastly, the new measurements to benchmark the political and legal inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian government and the government’s work, legislation, and policies to expand Indigenous self-determination will be described and reported upon.

## Indigenous Governance

The Government of Canada applies a distinctions-based approach to Indigenous policies and legislation to ensure that the distinctive rights, interests, and circumstances of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Peoples are properly implemented and addressed. The Government of Canada is pursuing this approach for Indigenous governance and commits to working in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in a manner that upholds Indigenous self-determination. However, critiques have been made that a distinctions-based approach ignores intersecting identities and the lived-experiences of Indigenous Peoples, excluding them from effective government policies and services. The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) emphasizes the exclusionary effect the distinctions-based approach has on urban Indigenous Peoples. NAFC is calling for the government of Canada to expand their distinctions-based approach beyond the identities of First Nation, Inuit, or Métis to include considerations of sex, gender, residency, geography, ability, and age.<sup>116</sup> The difficulties experienced by urban Indigenous Peoples in accessing Indigenous government services will be expanded upon further in this chapter.

Despite the recognition of the status of Indigenous Nations in the *Royal Proclamation* of 1763, Indigenous Peoples were excluded from the creation of the Canadian federation and the division of powers as established in the *Constitution Act, 1867*. Due to this exclusion, the power of Indigenous governments can only be delegated by provincial or federal governments, infringing the Indigenous right to self-determination. However, in a landmark SCC ruling on February 9, 2024, regarding *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Children, Youth, and Families* (the “Act”), Indigenous co-drafting of legislation was deemed a constitutionally valid route to affirming Indigenous inherent rights. Prior to this ruling, Indigenous Peoples could only seek self-determination through constitutional amendments or Treaty agreements, which are often slow and unpredictable processes that are subject to disruption by provinces or territories.

Exclusion also arises with Indigenous Peoples’ lack of statutory voice at federal policy tables. Although the prominence of Indigenous representation is growing, their authority remains limited and typically advisory in nature. The exclusion from the division of powers causes contentions and mistrust between Indigenous Peoples and provincial governments over lands and natural resources. Provincial governments seek to maximize economic development through resource extraction, often in conflict with Indigenous rights and interests to the land. The 2015 Final Report of the TRC linked the fundamental equality issues facing Indigenous Peoples in Canada with the exclusion of their legal and political status.

Indigenous Peoples are increasingly challenging this exclusion and asserting their right to self-determination. Modern treaties and self-government agreements are being negotiated, giving rise to the structures and mechanisms required to be actively involved in policy creation. Indigenous organizations

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<sup>116</sup> National Association of Friendship Centres (2020). *The Friendship Centre Movement & Canada’s Distinctions-Based Approach to Indigenous Self-Determination*.

also promote the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in policies by asserting their voices and pushing Indigenous needs into intergovernmental agendas. This has given rise to Canadian government officials seeking to collaborate with Indigenous partners at the policy table. This chapter will describe the various Indigenous governments and their influence and advocacy for Indigenous rights and well-being in Canadian policies, including in the area of economic development.

First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities in Canada have varying governance structures and decision-making processes, which causes a lack of measurable benchmarks for Indigenous governance. Previous *IEPRs* have utilized property taxation, Financial Management Board Certification, and Community Intervention Status as indirect measures of First Nation governance through the analysis of strong and transparent financial management and the generation of own-source revenue. Although indirect, these measures provide benchmarks for comparison between reports. The use of these benchmarks will be continued in this report to track changes and progress.

This report recommends using a new measurement of Indigenous representation in the Canadian national government as a benchmark for showing improvements to Indigenous political inclusion. With the June 21, 2023, release of the *UN Declaration Action Plan* and its strong emphasis on Indigenous self-determination, this report will also begin to measure the Action Plan's implementation as a benchmark for its progress.

## Métis Nation Organizational Structure

The Métis Nation's governance structures have evolved without a land base. Historically, Métis governments, including those designed to govern the buffalo hunt and the provisional government created during the Red River Resistance, were democratic. According to the Métis Nation Council (MNC), the current governance structure of the Métis Nation is the contemporary expression of the Métis Nation's centuries-old struggle for self-determination within the Canadian federation.<sup>117</sup>

In *R. v. Powley, 2003 (Powley)*, the SCC held that the Métis in and around Sault Ste. Marie in Ontario possess Aboriginal and treaty rights under section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. These section 35 recognized areas are jointly known as the Historic Sault Ste. Marie Métis Community and include Batchewana, Goulais Bay, Garden River, Bruce Mines, Desbarates, Bar River, St. Joseph's Island, Sugar Island, and Northern Michigan.

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<sup>117</sup> Métis National Council. (2024). *Governance*.



## Who are the Métis?

In 2002, the MNC adopted a “National Definition,” which says that “*Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation.*”<sup>118</sup> Then, in 2003, the SCC ruled on the *Powley* case, which upheld the Ontario Supreme Court of Justice’s prior definition that a Métis person is someone “*who (a) has some ancestral family connection, (b) identifies himself or herself as Métis and (c) is accepted by the Métis community or a locally-organized branch, chapter or council of a Métis association or organization with which that person wishes to be associated.*”<sup>119</sup> This definition supports that of the MNC.



The historic Métis Homeland encompasses the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba and extends into some parts of British Columbia, Ontario, the Northwest Territories, and the Northern United States. The Red River, along which many Métis people settled prior to the Red River Resistance, flows through Manitoba and into the north-central United States.

The issue of false Métis identity and the differences in citizenship criteria among Métis governments across Canada has many implications for Indigenous economic development. The issue of false claims to Indigenous identity is prevalent and takes away funding, opportunities, contracts, and support intended for Indigenous Peoples in Canada. This issue is exacerbated when governments and organizations accept Métis entities without meeting the identity criteria or possessing citizenship, feeding into the theft of Indigenous directed services and programs. Regarding citizenship, the MNBC, MNA, MN-S, and MMF have business directories available and business owners must be citizens of the respective Métis government to be listed on their directories. Putting together a unified business directory at the national level will pose a challenge given the varying citizenship criteria.

As well in *Powley*, Métis under section 35 were defined as a distinct group of people who have mixed Indigenous and European ancestry as well as their own customs and group identity separate from their Indigenous and European ancestors. The *Powley* Test was established to determine whether an individual can possess section 35 rights in accordance with this definition of Métis. To pass this test, an individual must identify as a Métis person and provide evidence that are an accepted member of a present-day Métis community and have ties to a historic Métis community. Métis representative organizations are responsible for registries of Métis individuals claiming section 35 rights in accordance with the *Powley* Test. These organizations are the MNC and their provincial counterparts: Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MN-S), Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC), and the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO); as well as the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF).

This section describes the governance structures of the Métis who fall under the MNC and the MMF.

The MNC has represented the Métis Nation on a national and international level since 1983. The MNC is composed of four Governing Members: MNBC, MNA, MN-S, and MNO. The Governing Members

<sup>118</sup> Métis National Council. (2024). *Citizenship*.

<sup>119</sup> Conn, H. (2018, December 3). *Powley Case*. The Canadian Encyclopedia.

constitute the General Assembly of the MNC and its Board of Governors. The President of the MNC is elected by delegates from the Board of Governors. The MNBC, MNA, MN-S, and MNO each represent the Métis citizens in their respective provinces.

*NOTE: MMF separated from the MNC in 2021 and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation is currently in negotiations with the Government of Canada and have not yet approached the MNC.*

In 2017, the Canada-Métis Nation Accord was signed between the Government of Canada and the MNC and its Governing Members at the time, the MNO, MMF, MN-S, MNA, and MNO. Many of the regional bodies have also signed further Métis Self-Government Recognition and Implementation Agreements with the Government of Canada (in February 2023: MNO, MN-S, MNA and MMF). These agreements recognize that each of these Métis Governments are the representative governments of their distinct Métis collectives and that they possess an inherent right to self-government recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. These agreements also commit the Government of Canada to negotiate a self-government Treaty with each Métis Government. Bill C-53 was introduced in June 2023 which “provides for the recognition of certain Métis governments in Alberta, Ontario, and Saskatchewan and provides a framework for the implementation of treaties entered into by those Métis governments and the Government of Canada.” See the Lands chapter for more information on Métis self-government and lands claim agreements.

On September 29, 2021, the MMF announced that it was withdrawing from the MNC. This decision was made due to concerns over membership governance within the organization and its governing members. Debates over what criteria should be used for membership has caused divisions among Métis organizations, stating only the interests and claims of Métis who have ties to the Red River Métis, regardless of their province of residence, should be upheld.<sup>120</sup>

#### Other Métis Regional Organizations

Other Métis regional organizations exists outside the governing scope of the MNC. The Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC) is the first and currently the only Métis self-government in Canada, representing the constitutionally recognized and protected people of the Alberta Métis settlements. The MSGC represents eight Métis settlements in northern Alberta: Buffalo Lake, East Prairie, Elizabeth, Fishing Lake, Gift Lake, Kikino, Paddle Prairie, and Peavine (Figure 59).

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<sup>120</sup> Lilley, R. (2021, September 29). *Manitoba Métis Federation Leaves Métis National Council*. CBC News.

**Figure 59: Modern Day Alberta Métis Settlements**



Source: Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada. (N/A). Métis Settlements and Farms.

The North Slave Métis Alliance (NSMA) is a non-profit society representing Métis from the Northern region of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories who possess Aboriginal rights as set out under section 35 of the *Constitution Act* and whose ancestors used and occupied the North Slave region prior to the signing of Treaty 11 in 1921. The NSMA's mandate is to assert, protect, and implement Aboriginal rights for North Slave Métis, protect the environment, and advance Métis education, economic, social, and cultural development. Along with advocacy work, the NSMA offers services and programs to member Métis, many in the areas of promoting traditional hunting, fishing, and land usage.

#### Métis Government Economic Development

The MNC works to advance Métis economic development and trade by supporting the capital corporations that each of their four Governing Members have established or are affiliated with, as well as seeking new and existing policies and programs with their federal and provincial partners.

The 2022 Métis Nation General Assembly adopted the following MNC Economic Development priorities:

- Canada to increase the support and tools to build Métis economic institutions for sustainable economic self-determination.
- Increase federal procurement from Métis owned businesses to reach 1.69% of total federal procurement contracts by the end of 2024.

- Canada to increase capital for Métis enterprises to assist in the growth of Métis owned businesses, Métis ownership in major projects and investments in Métis community owned entities.
- Canada to recognize the authority of Métis Governments to certify Métis citizen owned businesses and protect and defend Métis intellectual property.
- Canada to increase trade policy capacity and exports opportunities for the Métis Nation and Métis owned businesses.
- In accordance with the distinctions-based approach to policies, Canada to include the Métis Nation in the development of all economic development initiatives and provide funding to support the policy development and participation of the Métis Nation.

## Inuit Governance

Inuit Nunangat is the Inuit homeland consisting of 51 communities across four regions in northern Canada, making up 40% of Canada’s land areas and 72% of its coastline. The four Inuit land claims regions are the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik in Northern Quebec, and Nunatsiavut in Northern Labrador (Figure 60).

**Figure 60: Inuit Nunangat Map**



Sources: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Simplified Inuit Nunangat Map*, 2019.

The 1970’s Inuit land claim movement brought to creation today’s constitutionally-protected co-management partnerships that set out Inuit participation in resource-management decision-making and define Inuit land bases. The governance structure of each of the four regions are outlined in their constitutionally protected land claims agreements signed with Canada, each region with their own governing authority. See the Lands chapter for more information on the Inuit lands claim movement.

## Regional Organizations

### *Inuvialuit Region*

The Inuvialuit Settlement Region is governed by the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC) under the 1984 *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*. The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation was created to receive and manage the rights and benefits the Inuvialuit receive as a result of the settlement, such as title over certain lands, financial compensation, wildlife management, and economic and social development measures. On July 21, 2015, the IRC, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and the Government of Canada signed the *Inuvialuit Self-Government Agreement-in-Principle* which establishes the self-governing rights and powers of the future Inuvialuit Government. Negotiations are on-going to conclude the final Inuvialuit Self-Government Agreement for the Western Arctic Region.

### *Nunavut region*

Nunavut is governed by Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated (NTI) and the Government of Nunavut under the 1993 *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement*. The Agreement established Nunavut as a new territory, which came into fruition in 1999, as an expression of Inuit self-determination. A public Government of Nunavut was created to govern all residents of Nunavut as the Inuit were not seeking an Aboriginal government. NTI was made responsible for managing and distributing the funding Inuit receive under the settlement and advocating in the interest of Inuit in the implementation of the Agreement.

### **Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement**

On January 18, 2024, the Government of Canada, the Government of Nunavut, and NTI signed the *Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement*. This agreement is the largest land transfer in Canada's history which designates decision-making power to Nunavut and its residents regarding public lands, freshwater, and non-renewable resources. This step towards self-determination will create Northern-led jobs, opportunities and investments, allow Nunavut citizens to leverage the benefits of resource development, and ultimately advance economic prosperity for the people of Nunavut. The transfer of responsibilities is set to be completed by April 1, 2027.<sup>121</sup>

### *Nunavik Region*

Nunavik is governed by Makivik Corporation and the Kativik Regional Government (KRG) under the 1977 *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* and the 2008 *Nunavik Inuit Land Claim Agreement*. The Makivik Corporation was first created to administer the funds to the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* Beneficiaries. Makivik Corporation also follows mandates pertaining to owning profitable business enterprises and generating jobs, social economic development, improving housing conditions, and protecting Inuit language, culture, and environment. The KRG was created to deliver public services to Nunavummiut, pursuant to the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement*.

### *Nunatsiavut Region*

Nunatsiavut is governed by the Nunatsiavut Government under the 2005 *Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement* as the first Inuit region in Canada to achieve self-government. The Nunatsiavut Government have several departments that oversee important and necessary areas in the assertion of the right to self-govern: Education and Economic Development; Finance, Human Resources and Information Technology;

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<sup>121</sup> Prime Minister of Canada. (2024, January 18). *Government of Canada, Government of Nunavut, and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated reach final agreement on the devolution of Nunavut*.

Health and Social Development; Lands and Natural Resources; Language, Culture and Tourism; Nunatsiavut Affairs; and the Nunatsiavut Secretariat. See the Lands chapter for more information on the four Inuit Lands Claim Agreements.

### National Organizations

Established in 1971, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national organization protecting and advancing the rights and interests of Inuit. ITK's work includes research, advocacy, public outreach, and education on issues affecting the Inuit population. ITK provides representation to Inuit through their relationship with the Crown. They communicate a unified Inuit perspective on the issues affecting the population and also ensure that the government is consulting and accommodating the Inuit in Crown decisions that may affect their Aboriginal and treaty rights. ITK provides guidance to federal agencies, lawmakers, and other stakeholders on social and cultural policy. They conduct research to ensure that these policymakers are informed about the status of Inuit and the effectiveness of current policies and programs.

ITK is governed by a board comprised of four voting directors representing the four regional Inuit land claims organizations: IRC, NTI, Makivik Corporation, and Nunatsiavut. The board also has three non-voting permanent participants: Inuit Circumpolar Council of Canada (ICC), Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (Pauktuutit), and the National Inuit Youth Council (NIYC). The board has a president that is elected for three-year length terms by the four voting members.

### Inuit Government Economic Development

ITK's 2020-2023 Strategy and Action Plan set out several planned actions that pertain to advancing Inuit economic prosperity:

- **1.4** Advance poverty reduction interventions in Inuit Nunangat.
- **1.5** Advocate for federal procurement policies that benefit Inuit.
- **2.1** Advocate for the development of a formal Inuit Nunangat Policy as well as federal budget allocations to align with Inuit priorities.
- **2.2** Work to ensure federal procurement policies enhance regional economic development and benefit Inuit.
- **2.3** Facilitate Inuit partnership in Arctic and Northern Policy Framework implementation.
- **2.4** Enhance the effectiveness and impact of the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee.<sup>122</sup>

The government of Canada, ITK, and the four regional Inuit land claims organizations work together through the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee (ICPC) to advance shared priorities, improve prosperity in Inuit Nunangat, and strengthen the Inuit-Crown relationship. The presidents of ICC Canada, NIYC, and Pauktuutit are also permanent participants of the ICPC.

Pertaining to action **2.1**, in 2022, the ICPC co-developed and endorsed the Inuit Nunangat Policy. This policy recognizes Inuit Nunangat as a distinct geographical, cultural, and political region and that federal investments are essential for the realization of the Inuit right to self-determination and self-government. As such, this policy guides federal government organizations to consider the unique rights, interests, and circumstances of Inuit in their funding of Inuit Land Claims Organizations. The policy also guides the design

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<sup>122</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2022). *2022-2023 Strategy and Action Plan*.

and renewal of all federal policies, programs, services, and initiatives in Inuit Nunangat or for Inuit benefit, improving coordination across Inuit Nunangat and ensuring that Inuit are engaged with and consulted throughout the processes of policy design and implementation.

Regarding action **2.3**, the vision of the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF) is to close the socio-economic and service delivery gap for Indigenous residents in the North by guiding investments and activities through 2030.<sup>123</sup> On September 10, 2019, ITK released the Inuit Nunangat chapter of the ANPF as a deliverable of the ICPC. This chapter guides how the ANPF will be implemented in Inuit Nunangat to ensure Inuit priorities are advanced. The priorities the chapter focuses on include infrastructure and economic self-reliance, Inuit self-determination in research, education, and wildlife, and food security.

Nunasi is a fully Inuit-owned development corporation with shareholders representing the three Nunavut regions: Qikiqtani Inuit Association, Kivalliq Inuit Association, and Kitikmeot Corporation. Nunasi Corporation was first created in 1976 by ITK to help support and grow the Inuit presence in Canadian business. Today, Nunasi works closely with the Inuit Regional Development Corporations to support the economic well-being of Nunavummiut by investing in and growing Inuit business opportunities, with industry focus in health services, energy, infrastructure, and federal procurement.

## First Nation Governance

The majority of First Nations Communities in Canada are governed by a chief and council who make decisions on behalf of the community members. There are four ways to select First Nation leadership: under the *Indian Act*, under the *First Nations Election Act*, a community election system, and self-government.

### Indian Act Government

The *Indian Act* was federally imposed onto First Nations in 1876, determining many aspects of status First Nations lives, including how they govern their own communities according to a colonial governance system. As of August 2022, 582 First Nations govern under the *Indian Act*.<sup>124</sup> Around 200 of these First Nations elect their leadership following the *Indian Band Election Regulations*.

### Indian Act Government vs. Self-Government

**Indian Act** chief and council are a self-administrative government. They are accountable to the Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs who has the ultimate decision-making authority. The chief and council are confined to the governing structure and limited law-making powers set out in the *Indian Act*. The *Indian Act* claims Crown ownership over reserve land, greatly limiting chief and councils' ability to make decisions pertaining to the management and development of their land, as well as determines who is a band member. The ability for chief and council to increase their band's capacity is largely determined by the availability of funding they receive from Indigenous and Northern Affairs. However, some First Nations under the *Indian Act* self-generate revenue from economic ventures or from tax collection. Decisions on service delivery agreements, funding agreements, administrative agreements and a range of policy, program and resource issues are out of the control of the chief and council and are determined by the Government of Canada.

**Self-Governing** First Nations are practicing their inherent right to govern, and the leadership is accountable to their community. Self-governing First Nations create their own constitution, giving them the control to be self-determinate and make decisions that align with their culture and values. They can create their own governing structures, determine citizenship, create laws and policies, and have their own law enforcement and dispute

<sup>123</sup> Government of Canada. (2019). *Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*.

<sup>124</sup> Governance Operations Directorate. (2022). *Governance and Elections Overview*.

resolution systems. Self-governing First Nations have legal authority over their land, allowing them to make decisions pertaining to its management and development. This control over land creates revenue sources, generating the funding to build capacity. Other sources of revenue for self-governing First Nations include: natural resource extraction, use, and royalties, taxation, fiscal transfers, service funding agreements, fee for service, and self-generating revenue from economic ventures. Self-governing First Nations also negotiate jurisdictions and agreements on a government-to-government basis, nationally or internationally.

### First Nations Election Act

The *First Nations Election Act* and the *First Nations Elections Regulations* came into force on April 2, 2015. They were created in collaboration with First Nations organizations to improve the election process under the *Indian Act*. Many First Nations felt that the *Indian Act* election system was paternalistic and out-dated. Specifically of worry was that a two-year term was too short to make important changes and achieve accomplishments, the nomination regulations needed to be firmer, mail-in ballots were subject to tampering, the appeal process was slow and ineffective, and the absence of defined offences and penalties.<sup>125</sup>

The improvements made to the election process in the *First Nations Election Act* include an increased term of four years, the requirement that candidates for chief and councillors both be 18 years of age and band members, more rules regarding nominations and mail-in ballots, the creation of regulations for advance polls and the recounting of ballots, defined offences and penalties, appeals directed to provincial or federal courts, changes to the Minister of ISC's ability to remove elected officials, and stricter selection of the electoral officer.

The *First Nations Election Act* does not change the *Indian Act* election process. A First Nation council may choose to follow either system or their own community election system. A First Nation may come under the *First Nations Election Act* by request through the adoption of a band council resolution or when required to by the Minister of Indigenous Services due to a leadership dispute or corrupt practices.

### Community Election System

A First Nation that governs under the *Indian Act* may request the Minister of ISC to issue an order to remove their First Nation from the application of the *Indian Act's* electoral provisions and replace it with a community developed election code. The community developed election code must be approved by the community through a secret majority vote where at least 50% of the community participates. Unlike the election systems of the *Indian Act* and *First Nations Election Act*, ISC is not involved in the election process, except for documenting the results.

### Self-government

As of August 2022, there are 39 First Nations governing under a self-government agreement.<sup>126</sup> Self-government agreements are being negotiated between the government and First Nations to realize the Indigenous inherent right to self-govern as recognized in section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*. First Nations Communities under a self-government agreement move away from the *Indian Act* and create their own government with the decision-making power to deliver programs and services to their community as they see is best. The structure of the governing model and the law-making authorities will vary between agreements due to differing goals, cultures, histories, politics, economies, needs, priorities,

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<sup>125</sup> Government of Canada. (2013, October 29). *Backgrounder: First Nations Elections Act*.

<sup>126</sup> Governance Operations Directorate (2022). *Governance and Elections Overview*.



and the vision of self-determination of the involved First Nations. Self-governing First Nations establish their own laws and policies regarding leadership selection following their cultures and traditions. ISC is not involved in the election process, except for documenting the results. See the Lands chapter for more information on self-government agreements.

### The Assembly of First Nations

The AFN is the national advocacy organization for First Nations in Canada, working to advance the collective aspirations of First Nations across Canada on matters of national or international concern through policy development, education, and the co-development of legislation to build the capacity of First Nations.

The AFN follows mandates issued by the First Nations-in-Assembly, such as advancing First Nations health, economies, the environment, education, language, clean water, and social and infrastructure development. AFN's 10 regions are: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Quebec/Labrador, Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia, Yukon, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories.

There are other councils of the AFN who act as the voice of First Nations to inform the work of the AFN. The Women's Council provides the perspective of First Nations women, the Youth Council amplifies the issues facing First Nation youth, the Veteran's Council ensures that First Nation Veterans are properly recognized, and the 2SLGBTQ+ Council represents the Two-Spirited First Nations.

### First Nation Government Economic Development

The AFN has an Economic Development and Infrastructure Branch (EDI) that works to close the socio-economic gap by advancing First Nation jurisdiction and control over program and service delivery in the areas of infrastructure, fisheries and economic development. Its various sectors within the EDI promote sustainability, First Nations self-determination in the economy, and economic recovery and prosperity, among others. Some of the important work done by the EDI to advance Indigenous economic development includes: more than \$150 million in support towards supplies, training and licences/quotas for Indigenous fisheries; creation of 880 annual jobs for First Nations harvesters and land-based workers through financial supports; and advocating and working towards First Nation inclusion in the cannabis and gaming industries.

### Urban Indigenous Governance

From the 2021 Census, Statistics Canada reported 1,807,250 Indigenous people living in Canada, 801,045 of which lived in large urban centers. More specifically:

- 40.1% of the 1,048,405 First Nation population lived in large urban centers;
- 55.4% of the 624,220 Métis living in Canada in 2021 lived in large urban centers; and,
- 15.3% of the total 70,545 Inuit living in Canada in 2021 lived in large urban centers.

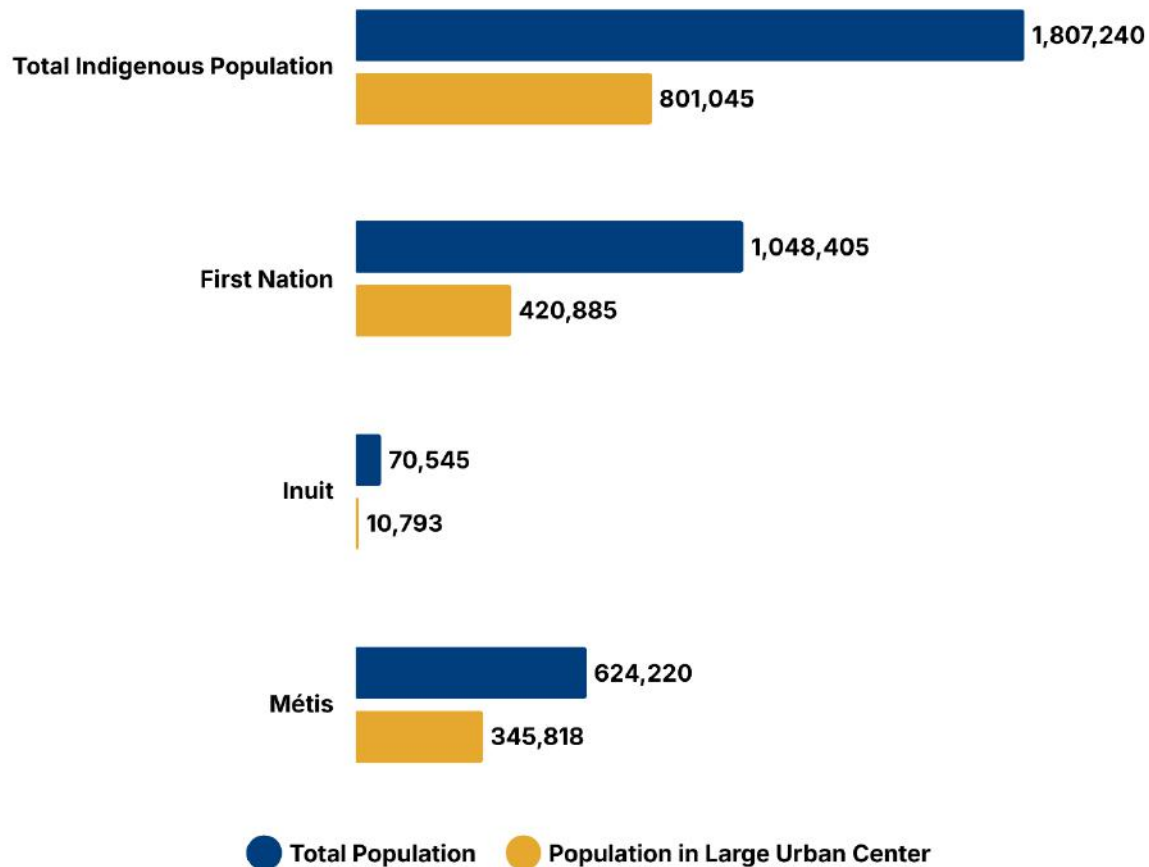
It is important to note that both non-status and status 'Indians' under the *Indian Act* are included in the First Nations data set. Statistics Canada reported that 71.8% of the total number of First Nations have Registered or Treaty Status under the *Indian Act*<sup>127</sup> (Figure 61).

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<sup>127</sup> Statistics Canada. (2022, September 21). *Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-Indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed.*

Figure 61 : Urban Indigenous Populations from Census 2021

## Urban Indigenous Populations from Census 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, 2022.

Urban Indigenous persons are still represented by their communities and the respective governing authorities. However, living away from their home communities, urban Indigenous persons are subject to the provincial services of general application, which are often not culturally appropriate. The lack of culturally aligned services may discourage urban Indigenous persons from accessing the services needed. Gaps in services provided are exacerbated by jurisdictional disputes between federal and provincial governments and inadequate funding. Various organizations and programs have been created to address this issue, including the National Urban Indigenous Coalition Council (NUICC), friendship centres, and urban programming for Indigenous Peoples.

### Leading Practices in Indigenous Governance

Group ATN Consulting conducted a review of promising best practices of Indigenous self-governance in report entitled *Final Report: Innovative Governance Structures to Support Indigenous Economic Growth*. The review primarily focused on Listuguj Mi'gmaq Government, Miawpukek First Nation, Membertou First Nation, Nipissing First Nation, Osoyoos Indian Band, Tsuut'ina Nation, Mi'kmaw Economic Benefits Office (MEBO), and the Joint Economic Development Initiative (JEDI).

The results of the literature review outlined the following best practices:

- Successful models put the community at the forefront.
- Engagement throughout the process is key, as well as reporting on results and keeping a strong focus on the future (seven generations).
- Communities typically demonstrate their ability to govern well before seeking recognition. This is done by putting in place laws and systems within which self-governance could be activated.
- In most of the communities examined, there is strong dedication and perseverance in working towards self-governance. Through extensive engagement with band and community members, bands are able to present a united front in negotiations.
- To boost the economic development of Indigenous communities, the Indigenous organizations examined often developed programs and initiatives targeted at Indigenous entrepreneurs and job seekers. These programs provide support and training to members to build capacity and to boost the economic situation of individuals in the community, which has a range of social benefits.
- An emphasis on creating strong partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations to advance the interests of Indigenous communities and establish agreements which have been critical to the economic development of these communities.
- Advancing policies and laws through grassroots, community-based mobilization processes to ensure that the laws and policies are supported by the community once in place.
- In bands that are self-governing or have control over a considerable amount of their activities, control is preceded by the development of a land code. Where successfully applied, it has paved the way for other programs and initiatives since it replaced the restrictive provisions for land use under the Indian Act.<sup>128</sup>

## Indicators of Good Governance

### First Nations: Community Intervention Status

Programs and services are delivered to First Nations through funding agreements made between ISC and the recipient First Nation. If the recipient defaults on the legally binding terms and conditions contained in the funding agreement, the recipient is subject to one of three levels of default management under the *Default Prevention and Management Policy (DPMP)*:

1. *Recipient Managed (RM)*: The recipient must create a management action plan that is approved by ISC that remedies the default and prevents recurrence.
2. *Recipient-Appointed Advisor (RAA)*: The recipient contracts an advisor as part of their action plan to remedy the default and prevent recurrence.
3. *Third-Party Funding Agreement Management (TPFAM)*: ISC contracts a manager to administer the funding for program and service delivery and to remedy the cause(s) for the default. This level of default management is a last resort and is temporary to ensure that the First Nation community members continue to receive their programs and services.

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<sup>128</sup> Group ATN Consulting INC. (2023). *Final Report: Innovative Governance Structures to Support Indigenous Economic Growth*.

Generally, a recipient defaults if the health, safety, and welfare of the community is compromised or at risk to be, the recipient's obligations under the funding agreement have not been met, the recipient's annual audited financial statements are flagged, the delivery of programs and services are at risk due to recipient's financial position, the recipient is bankrupt or at risk to be, or the recipient has lost corporate status or is at risk to. Recipients under default management are regularly reassessed to determine the appropriate level of management; therefore, the number of First Nations under default and their level of management varies across time.<sup>129</sup>

Some of the root causes that may lead to a recipient's default on the funding agreement include the structure of contribution agreements, the underfunding of First Nations Communities in general, capacity challenges, governance challenges, and limited self-generated revenue. As such, a First Nation entering into default management shouldn't be regarded as a sole indicator to explain a Nation's economic situation.

For example, as the population grows in First Nations Communities, the amount of funding received remains the same. In addition, contribution agreements provide funding only for specified program areas, without the ability to modify funding areas should unforeseen circumstances arise. Many Nations also cannot afford a financial expert who can help with long-term financial planning and economic development opportunities. Lastly, the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs noted that a First Nation community is often not advised that they are on the path towards intervention and does not receive the support and resources needed to address defaults or have the opportunity to course correct.

When under intervention, a First Nation is also put in a worse position to achieve financial health. The Band must pay \$170,000 annually out of their Band Support funding to cover intervention. This money is taken away from investing in growing the financial management capacity of First Nations. Bands in default management also miss out on economic development opportunities and private sector funding that help to improve financial health. For example, Bands under intervention are not eligible for Ministerial Loan Guarantees that help finance the construction of homes.<sup>130</sup>

#### Decrease in Number of First Nations under the Default Prevention and Management Policy

When assessing community intervention data, it must be remembered that it is not a general measure for well-being since communities under intervention may be performing well in other areas. However, data does provide an indirect measure of the number of communities where partial governance challenges may exist.

Since the 2019 *IEPR*, there has been a 42.2% decrease in the average number of First Nations under the DPMP. In the 2019 report, data concluded that an average of 147 First Nations were under intervention.<sup>131</sup> In 2023, an average of 85 communities were under DPMP.<sup>132</sup> In the 2015 *Aboriginal Economic Progress Report*, 151 communities were averaged to have been under DPMP intervention in 2014<sup>133</sup>, indicating a

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<sup>129</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. (2023, July 27). *Default Prevention and Management Policy Explained*.

<sup>130</sup> Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. (2017). *Default Prevention and Management 2017*. 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, 1st session.

<sup>131</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019) *Indigenous Economic Progress Report*.

<sup>132</sup> Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. (2023).

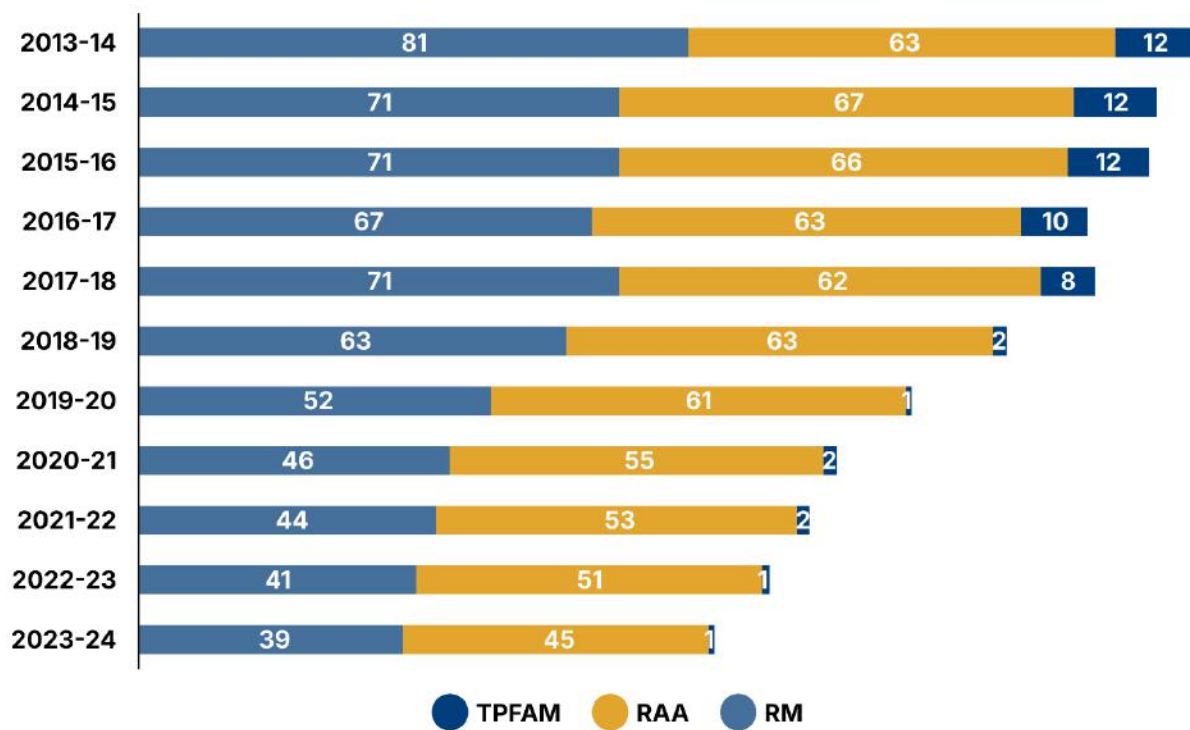
<sup>133</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2015). *Aboriginal Economic Progress Report*.

43.7% decrease in the 2023 data. Progress has been made to improve the financial management of First Nation Bands. Overall, there has been a steady decrease in the average number of First Nations under DPMP since the 2013-2014 fiscal year. This rate of decrease has accelerated in pace since the 2019 report. (Figure 62).

As of December 2023, there are 64 First Nations under the DPMP with 29 in RM, 34 in RAA and one in TPFAM (Figure 63).<sup>134</sup>

**Figure 62: Average Number of First Nations under Default Prevention and Management Policy per Fiscal Year, 2013-14 to 2023-24**

### Average Number of First Nations under Default Prevention and Management Policy per Fiscal Year, 2013-14 to 2023-24

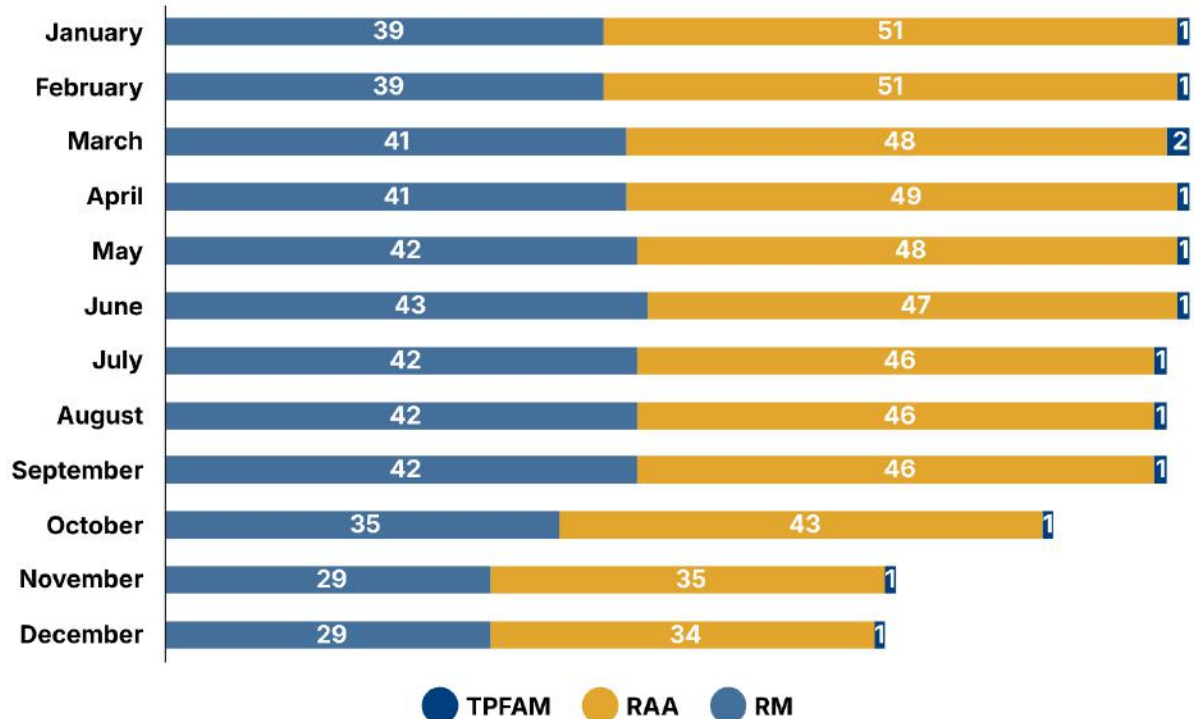


Source: CIRNA, 2023.

<sup>134</sup> Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. (2023).

Figure 63: Monthly Number of First Nations under Default Prevention and Management Policy in 2023

## Monthly Number of First Nations under Default Prevention and Management Policy in 2023



Source: CIRNA, 2023.

In 2023, the number of First Nations under DPMP had decreased steadily since July due to changes being made to the policy. An interim directive was made effective June 1, 2023, to replace the DPMP. The interim directive disallows further application of the first two levels of default management, RM and RAA, and on a case-to-case basis, exits First Nations from default that currently are in RM or RAA. TPFAM can be applied as a last resort when a First Nation is not “legally able to sign” the funding agreement due to resignations, deaths, or governance disputes, when the First Nation is unable to reach quorum and cannot administer the funding agreement, and when there is an unacceptable risk of service disruption, and the First Nation government is no longer collaborating and/or leading mitigation. Regions were also directed to work closely with the First Nations under DPMP to develop an action plan to deescalate out of DPMP. This interim directive is in place until the new policy, the *Collaboration and Continuity of Services Policy* is finalized and replaces the DPMP.

### First Nations: Property Taxation Status

First Nations can issue property taxation by-laws on reserve land by enacting by-laws under section 83 of the *Indian Act*, or under the *First Nations Fiscal Management Act* (FNFMA). The FNFMA is a modern comprehensive fiscal legal framework that supports fiscal law-making. First Nation councils can request to be added to the Schedule of the FNFMA. When scheduled, the First Nation has the fiscal power to enact the local revenue laws in the FNFMA, including the taxation of reserve lands and the interests or rights in reserve lands. A First Nation can enact property taxation by-laws without the support of the FNFMA under

section 83 of the *Indian Act*. However, their powers and jurisdictions are limited in comparison, and any proposed by-law must receive ministerial approval with advice provided by the First Nations Tax Commission. The FNFMA enhances self-determination for First Nations by increasing their power over financial management, local revenue, including property taxation, and financing for infrastructure and economic development.<sup>135</sup>

Issuing property taxation on reserve land, either under the FNFMA or the *Indian Act*, helps improve the well-being of First Nations. By enacting a property taxation law, a First Nation establishes jurisdiction over the land to which it is applied, preventing provincial and municipal governments from taxing non-band members using the land. Further, real property taxation is a source of self-generated revenue for First Nations that can be reinvested back into the community to address needs and for economic growth.<sup>136</sup>

### Increase in Number of First Nations Applying Property Taxation

At the end of 2022-2023, 144 First Nations were exercising property taxation authority under the FNFMA, and 28 First Nations were enacting property taxation by-laws under section 83 of the *Indian Act*, for a total of 172 First Nations.<sup>137</sup> There has been an 11.7% increase in the total number of First Nations enacting property taxation by-laws since the 154 in 2018 that was reported in the 2019 *IEPR*. Since the 2018 data, there has also been a 31.7% decrease in First Nations doing so under the *Indian Act* and a 27.4% increase in First Nations acting under the FMA.<sup>138</sup> The property taxation data presented in the 2015 *Aboriginal Economic Progress Report* indicates a trend of an increasing number of First Nations applying property taxation, and a decreasing number doing so under the *Indian Act*. Since 2012, the total number of First Nations applying property taxation has almost doubled from 91 to 172. In 2012, 28 First Nations were doing so under the FNFMA. Today, 28 are doing so under the *Indian Act* and 144 are doing so under the FNFMA.<sup>139</sup>

### First Nations: Financial Management Certification

The First Nations Financial Management Board (FMB) certifies First Nations who work with the FMB, providing the First Nation with a qualitative reference of their financial management based on their previous years of audited financial statements. The FMB offers two certifications: Financial Management System and Financial Performance. The Financial Performance (FP) Certification indicates that a First Nation is in good financial health by meeting the standards of financial performance. The FP Certification provides First Nations with a review of their finances, revealing the areas in need of improvement, improves the confidence that community members, lenders, and business partners have in the First Nation, and allows the First Nation to apply to be a borrowing member of the loans provided by the First Nations Finance Authority (FNFA). The Financial Management System (FMS) Certification indicates that the First Nation uses good governance and financial practices according to the FMB's Financial Administration Law. This in turn improves the confidence that community members, lenders, and business partners have in the First Nation and leaves the First Nation in good standing to continue being a borrowing member with the FNFA.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> First Nations Tax Commission. (2023). *Overview: Regulation Frameworks*.

<sup>136</sup> First Nations Tax Commission. (2023). *Why enact a property taxation law of by-law?*

<sup>137</sup> Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. (2023).

<sup>138</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019). *Indigenous Economic Progress Report*.

<sup>139</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2015). *Aboriginal Economic Progress Report*.

<sup>140</sup> First Nations Financial Management Board. (2024). *Certify First Nations*.

FMB certification provides benefits for the community, council, and staff of a First Nation. Having access to the low-cost loans provided by the FNFA allows First Nations to invest into more community projects and grow the economy. By being recognized as having good governance and financial practices, a community will have more confidence in their council to make good decisions and the First Nation can deliver higher quality services. A chief and council with good governance works more efficiently and collaboratively, allowing for better informed decisions, faster task completion, transparency, and more time to work towards long-term goals.<sup>141</sup>

#### Increase in Number of First Nations with FMB Certification

As of June 2024, there are 238 First Nations with an FP Certification and 66 with an FMS Certification for a total of 304 FMB Certified First Nations.<sup>142</sup> This is around a 201% increase from the 101 FMB Certified First Nations reported in the 2019 *IEPR* as of January 2018.<sup>143</sup> In March 2014, there were 34 FMB certified First Nations.<sup>144</sup> Therefore, in a decade, there has been a 764.7% increase in First Nations with FMB Certification. This indicates that the number of First Nations that are achieving good governance and financial practices that meet the FMB standards are increasing at a significant rate.

## New Measures for Benchmarking

#### Indigenous Voice and Representation in Canadian National Governance

As described in this chapter's introduction, Indigenous nations do not have an authoritative voice in Canadian federalism due to their typical exclusion at policy tables. Increased representation is needed in the Canadian Government to discuss varying issues, needs, histories and cultures of Indigenous communities across Canada and to be represented and heard at the federal level. Indigenous elected officials bring this knowledge and their lived experiences as Indigenous persons to debates in the House of Commons. They advocate for the rights and well-being of their nation and incorporate their Indigenous beliefs and perspectives to create a Canadian government that better represents Indigenous Peoples.

The 1996 RCAP Report called for a third chamber of Parliament for Indigenous representation in the Canadian government. The theoretical, constitutionally entrenched House of the First Peoples would have representatives from each nation in Canada. This chamber would have the power to review or override decisions of the House of Commons in respect of their jurisdictional responsibility over "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians" under section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, as well as any other decisions that will substantially affect the lives of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>145</sup> However, there is currently no indication that the government is considering adopting this suggestion.

#### Increase of Indigenous Representation in Canadian National Governance

The first Indigenous person elected to the House of Commons was Métis leader Louis Riel in 1874 and from then to 2000, only 14 individuals identifying as Indigenous were elected to the House of Commons.<sup>146</sup> That number has increased dramatically in recent years. In the 2015 Canadian Federal Elections, an

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<sup>141</sup> First Nations Financial Management Board. (2024). *Benefits*.

<sup>142</sup> First Nations Financial Management Board. (2024). *Client List*.

<sup>143</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019). *Indigenous Economic Progress Report*.

<sup>144</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2015). *Aboriginal Economic Progress Report*.

<sup>145</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). Appendix 3B: A Summary of the Proposal by the Native Council of Canada for a House of the First Peoples. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People Volume 2 – Restructuring the Relationship*.

<sup>146</sup> Hunter, A. (2020, March 4). *Exploring the Issues of Aboriginal Representation in Federal Elections*. Elections Canada.



unprecedented 11 Indigenous Members of Parliament (MPs) were elected, including Jody Wilson-Raybould who was appointed as the first Indigenous Minister of Justice.<sup>147</sup> Despite this impressive increase, Indigenous MPs still made up only 3.25% of representatives in the House of Commons. In 2019, 10 Indigenous MPs were elected, and in 2021 this number increased to 12.<sup>148</sup>

Another milestone was reached in 2021 when Mary Simon, who is Inuk from Nunavik, was appointed the first Indigenous governor general of Canada. While this represents a non-partisan appointment with no legislative impact, it remains a success story.<sup>149</sup>

Then, in August 2022, Michelle O'Bonsawin became the first Indigenous person nominated to the SCC. This represents a milestone in Canadian law for Indigenous Peoples. An Indigenous perspective is essential in a court that interprets Indigenous rights, resolves jurisdiction conflicts, and makes decisions on Indigenous self-determination.

Beyond the indicators for good governance mentioned above, the Centre for First Nations Governance research has identified five key pillars for effective Indigenous Governance. They include:

1. The People;
2. The Land;
3. Laws and Jurisdiction;
4. Governing Systems; and,
5. Resources.

Many of these pillars have been mentioned throughout this chapter and represent traditional values of Indigenous nations combined with modern realities of self-governance.<sup>150</sup>

The Center highlights the need for governance systems that are fair and transparent. Rebuilding Indigenous traditional governing systems that were participatory and focused on information sharing will be central to ensuring that governance systems are equitable going forward.

#### Government Implementation of the *UN Declaration*

In 2016, the Government of Canada endorsed the *UN Declaration* which affirms the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples with international human rights law, and committed to its full and effective implementation. In 2021, *UNDA* was given Royal Assent, requiring the Government of Canada to implement the *UN Declaration* in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples. This solidifies Canada's commitment to a "renewed, nation-to-nation, Inuit-Crown and government-to-government relationship with Indigenous Peoples – a relationship based on the recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership".

As such, Canada's implementation of the *UN Declaration* is an absolute minimum requirement. In 46 articles, the *UN Declaration* sets out these minimum standards through the affirmation of collective and

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<sup>147</sup> Papillon, M. (2022). Nation to Nation? Canadian Federalism and Indigenous Multilevel Governance. In H. Bakvis & G. Skogstad (Eds.), *Canadian Federalism: Performance, Effectiveness, Legitimacy* (4th ed., pp. 395-426). University of Toronto Press.

<sup>148</sup> Chen, A. (2021, September 29). 'We have drive': Indigenous MPs on their election and their future. The Hill Times.

<sup>149</sup> The Governor General of Canada. (N/A). *Biography*.

<sup>150</sup> Centre for First Nations Governance. (2024). *The Five Pillars of Effective Governance*.

individual rights. In relation to governance and economic development, these rights include the right to self-determination, self-government, and recognition of treaties, participation in decision-making and Indigenous institutions, economic and social rights, and civil and political rights.

On June 21, 2023, the Government of Canada released the *UN Declaration 2023-2028 Action Plan* which was created in consultation and cooperation with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis across Canada over two years. The Action Plan establishes 181 measures that the whole-of-government must act upon in partnership with Indigenous Peoples to implement the rights and principles set out in the *UN Declaration*.

The FMB launched an important framework aimed at defining a new Crown-Indigenous relationship called the “Self-Determination and Governance Framework”. This tool can be used to evaluate a community’s actual level of self-determination and identify steps to increase this level, in an effort to move away from *Indian Act* principles. This Framework is thought to be a pivotal tool aimed at including Indigenous traditions in a contemporary governance setting.<sup>151</sup>

In future *IEPRs*, the government’s action plan implementation can be monitored to determine how Indigenous governance is being advanced in the federation.

#### Implementation of the *UN Declaration* Action Plan

A part of the implementation thus far has involved the continued execution and advancement of several federal laws that uphold the rights set out in the *UN Declaration*, including:

- *The Indigenous Languages Act* with the purpose to preserve, promote and revitalize Indigenous languages;
- *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* with the purpose to affirm the Indigenous inherent right of self-government by devolving jurisdiction over child and family services for Indigenous children to Indigenous governing bodies<sup>152</sup>; and,
- *The Impact Assessment Act* which establishes the provisions for Indigenous participation in impact assessments of Government of Canada projects.

Aside from the continued enforcement of pre-existing Acts, the Action Plan implementation is currently in the beginning stages, with on-going collaboration with Indigenous partners on the prioritization of Action Plan measures and development of implementation plans.

The Department of Justice has implemented several policies and programs to ensure that all departments are acting in accordance with the *UN Declaration* in the performance of their work and advancement of legislation, including releasing annual reports to track departmental progress on Action Plan Measures.

## Conclusion

Since the previous 2019 *IEPR*, improvements have been made in the three measurements used to benchmark good governance for the facilitation of economic development. The significant 201% increase in number of First Nation bands certified by the FMB indicates that more bands are showcasing strong and transparent financial management skills, increasing their ability to work with lenders and business

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<sup>151</sup> Institute on Governance & First Nations Financial Management Board. (2018). *First Nations Governance Project: Phase 1*.

<sup>152</sup> *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, S.C. 2019, c. 24.

partners. There has been a 42.2% decrease in the average number of First Nations under the Default Prevention Management Policy, further demonstrating the improving financial management of First Nation bands. The 11.7% increase in the total number of First Nations enacting property taxation by-laws shows that more bands are able to benefit economically by reinvesting this self-generated revenue back into the community.

This section also concluded that there are more than 50% of Indigenous Peoples that live in urban populations. Many non-Indigenous urban service-delivery organizations do not necessarily provide culturally sensitive services to Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, information on where and how to access programs and services is sometimes not readily available to urban Indigenous Peoples. This situation can be especially challenging for Indigenous Peoples who are moving from their community into an urban area. Programs have the greatest chance of success when delivered in a culturally sensitive manner. The NIEDB has made recommendations in this regard to increase the level and scope of programming available to urban Indigenous individuals.

The new measurement of Indigenous voice in Canadian national governance shows that Indigenous representation in the federal sphere is growing. There has been a 200% increase in Indigenous MPs between the election of 2000 where four Indigenous MPs were elected, compared to the current 12 Indigenous MPs in the House of Commons. With this, Indigenous economic needs are increasingly being represented and advocated for at the federal level. At the time of writing, the implementation of *UNDA* remains in the measure prioritization and plan development stage through the consultation and cooperation with Indigenous Peoples. However, the July 2024 Annual Report and those in the years to follow will provide the subsequent *IEPRs* with significant information on the progress of implementation since the release of the Action Plan in June 2023.

As made evident in this chapter, Indigenous Peoples are defending their right to self-determination, pushing for their voices to be heard in the Canadian government, participating in consultations with the government on legislation and policies that will affect them, and improving their government's capacities to grow the economic development in their communities. Overall, progress has been made and the gap for the underlying indicator of governance has drawn smaller since the previous *IEPRs* due to Indigenous Peoples continuing to assert their rights. It is important that the foundations for contemporary governance include notions of traditional Indigenous knowledge paired with modern self-determination values.

This chapter has demonstrated that strong governance systems contribute to a community's ability to take advantage of economic opportunities. Successful community governance is supported by transparent financial management and proficiency in revenue generation. In light of this, the NIEDB has recommended in the past that there needs to be ongoing and expanded support for governance and financial management training and certification to support robust economic development opportunities for Indigenous communities across Canada.

#### 2019 *IEPR* Governance Recommendations:

- ***Ongoing and expanded support for governance and financial management training and certification. (Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 5, 84, 92,93)***

#### 2024 Proposed Governance Recommendations:

- *Provide support for governance systems that are Indigenous-led and aligned with a community's unique traditional culture, including representing the voices of women, children, and elders.*
- *Provide support for the development of leading Indigenous governance tools and practices to be shared with Indigenous communities*
- *Encourage more First Nations to enact property taxation by-laws to generate own-sourced revenue for community reinvestment from non-Indigenous entities operating in their territories.*
- *Implement transparent and results-based processes, including tracking and reporting on data collection efforts and results so that community members may access and see change firsthand.*
- *Develop and expand programs services offered by Friendship Centres and other Indigenous organizations that are tailored to the unique needs of urban Indigenous populations.*

## UNDERLYING INDICATOR #4: LANDS AND RESOURCES

*“But it comes back to the same issue: what we thought was ours isn’t actually ours; and people can come onto our lands, and take from our lands, and leave us still a marginalized people and largely in poverty, while the wealth that is generated from those lands goes to private corporations and to the rest of Canada.”*

– Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami President, Natan Obed

### Lands and Resources Highlights

#### Devolution Process

As Nunavut’s devolution agreement came into effect April 1, 2024, the devolution process has been completed in all three territories.

#### Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination Tables


While there has been no additional modern treaties and self-government agreements signed since the 2019 progress report, the Government of Canada has established Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination Tables. There are currently 186 active negotiations through these tables with 171 pertaining to First Nations, eight to Métis, and six to Inuit.

#### Specific Claims

From January 1st, 2016, to January 31, 2024, there have been 278 Specific Claims resolved for close to \$9.9 billion in compensation. The proportion of claims accepted for negotiation has increased from 55% in 2014-15 to around 92% in 2022-23. Further, the pace of claims resolution has increased with a record 56 claims resolved in 2022-23 for a total amount of \$3.5 billion in compensation.

 **\$9.9B**  
in compensation  
since 2016

#### First Nations in the *First Nations Land Management Act*

 **48.1%**  
in # of First Nations  
under the Act since  
2018

The number of First Nations in the *First Nations Land Management Act* increased from 131 in 2018 to 194 as of November 2022. 23 Nations have ratified their land codes since 2019, bringing the total number of operational *First Nations Land Management Act* communities to 101. 56 First Nations are in development, and 3 have moved to self-government.

#### Additions to Reserves

- From 2018-2022, there have been a total of 238 Additions to Reserves. Of the 238, 192 are in rural areas, 46 are in urban areas, 2 were new reserves, 55 were community additions and 181 were legal obligations. As of November 24, 2022, there were around 1,036 active Additions to Reserves.
- The Additions to Reserve policy is being re-designed by Indigenous Services Canada under First Nations leadership. Policy options are targeted for release in spring 2025.

#### Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas

Indigenous Protected Areas and Conserved Areas and the Indigenous Guardians initiative represent a recent and promising new path to realize Indigenous economies that reflect Indigenous values towards land. It is recommended that more be done in these areas to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are given rightful control of their land to pursue economic opportunities.

## Introduction

For Indigenous governments and communities, in addition to economic value such as sustaining and providing a livelihood, land is fundamental to cultural identity, traditional knowledge, language, and ceremony. In contrast to the Western capitalist notion of land as a commodity, valued primarily for development and extraction, Indigenous approaches uphold the need for balance in relationships, balance between the use of land and resources as economic inputs, and preservation of the ecological integrity and biodiversity of land.

“Our culture as Hupacasath comes from our relationship to the land. Our language comes from the land, our place names describe what is on the land, the sound the animals make or what animals do. The material for our homes, longhouses, our canoes, or regalia, our art and some of our clothing comes from forest ecosystems. The forests cradle the very watersheds that make viable streams for our salmon which are the mainstay of our diet.” (Affidavit #2 of Judith Sayers, per Van Wagner, 2021).

Indigenous control of lands and greater clarity about overlapping areas of jurisdictional authority are fundamental to economic development and self-determination. It allows incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and being into decisions regarding land use, development, and environmental protection. It also allows Indigenous Peoples to realize the benefits of resource-based economic opportunities on their territories (such as mining, agriculture, and commercial and residential development) that existing land management regimes and processes may otherwise impede.

This chapter revisits the measures used to assess the degree of control over lands enjoyed by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, including:

- (i) Land Settlement agreements: Historic Treaties, Comprehensive Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements, Rights Recognition and Specific Claims;
- (ii) the uptake of the *Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management* (formerly enacted by the *First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA)*, which was repealed in 2022);
- (iii) the acreage added by the Additions to Reserve process; and,
- (iv) Indigenous Protected Areas.

In addition to these three measures, additional factors bearing on economic success are discussed, including impediments and leading practices associated with control and management of land. This discussion provides a more detailed picture that demonstrates what is necessary for communities to progress, along with concrete steps toward reclaiming jurisdiction and authority over their territories.

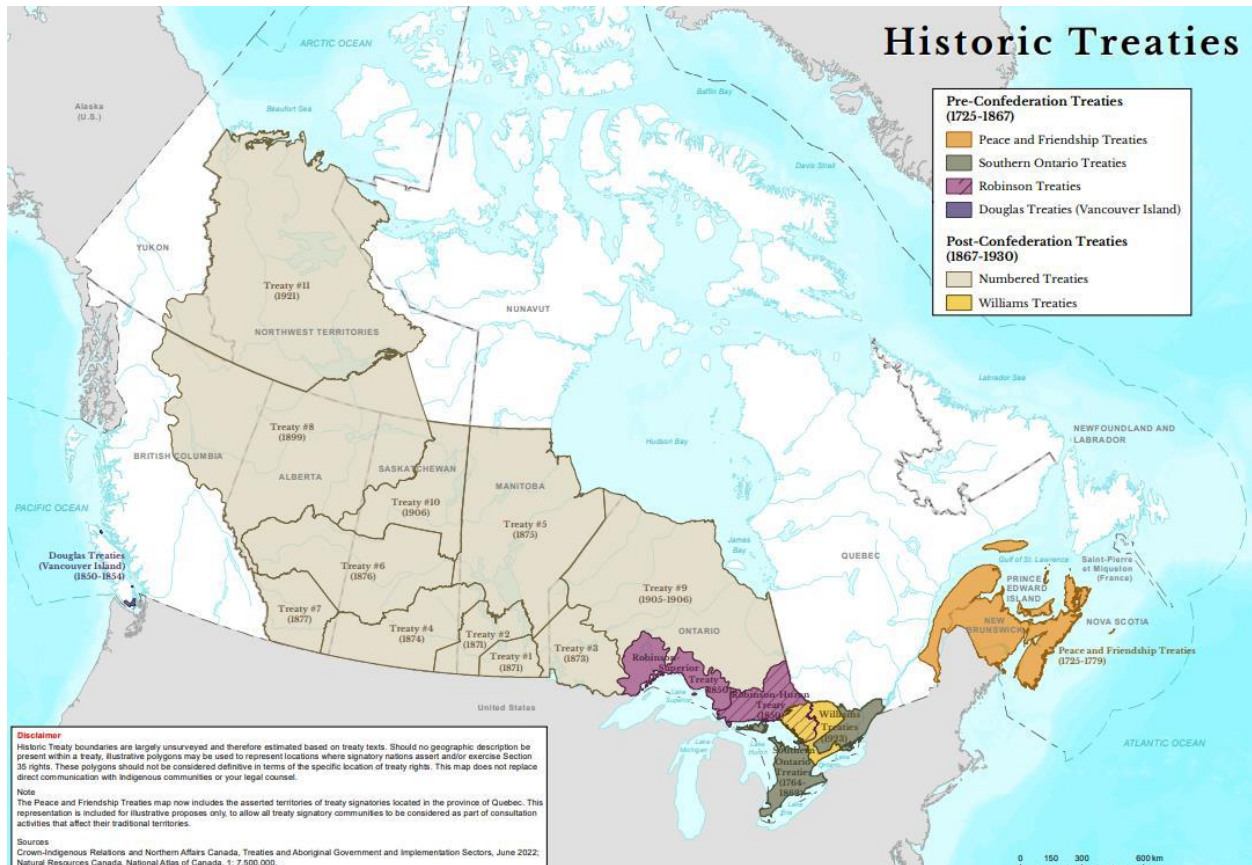
This updated report helps to expand understanding of the effectiveness of these policy and legislative measures, as well as other factors associated with successful economic development of Indigenous lands.

## Agreements and Recognition

### Historic Treaties

Historic Treaties, signed before 1975, form the basis of the relationship between the Crown and the 364 First Nations who signed them, representing over 600,000 people (Figure 64). In Canada, the British Crown began entering into treaties in 1701 to support peaceful economic and military relations among Nations. These Historic Treaties were often based on mutual respect and cooperation and defined the rights of Indigenous Peoples and European newcomers along with the responsibilities of the Crown. In some cases, treaties signed after 1763 resulted in the exchange of large areas of land that were occupied by First Nations to the Crown for reserve lands and benefits.

**Figure 64: Historic and Numbered Treaties in Canada**



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, Geomatics Services, June 2022.

Over many centuries, relationships between First Nations and the Crown were eroded by colonial and paternalistic policies enacted into laws. The specific claims process provides an avenue for First Nations to address past grievances concerning the management of land and other assets, along with the fulfillment of historic treaties. Resolution of these claims through negotiated settlements helps to address past wrongs, honour treaty obligations, and rebuild these relationships.

In historic treaties, treaty rights and benefits often, but not always, include:

- land to be set aside for First Nations use only, known as reserves;
- money to be paid to a First Nation every year, known as annuities;
- hunting and fishing rights on unoccupied Crown land;
- schools and teachers on reserves to be paid for by the government; and,
- one-time benefits, such as farm equipment and animals, ammunition, and clothing.

However, according to a report on Indigenous Economic Development by the OECD, the historic treaties left Indigenous Peoples with a “disproportionate and fragmented land base, with limited commercial and residential use and limited natural resources. Indigenous people also have different levels of property

rights.”<sup>153</sup> The OECD report singles out that securing land tenure is fundamental for negotiating benefit sharing agreements which can provide economic development opportunities. Providing Indigenous Peoples with their historic land back is the key to economic sustainability and success.

### Métis Modern Land Claims

The Métis have always been connected to the land. Historically, the Métis had an extensive land base throughout the Prairie West, and the northern Plains States (Figure 65).

**Figure 65: Northwest Territories, 1870**



The Métis claim to land dates back to 1870, when the new Dominion of Canada acquired Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company without the prior consent of the region's Indigenous Peoples: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. During the same period of time (1874-1924), European agricultural settlement in the region increased, and the government of Canada took steps to ensure the transfer of land to settlers from the Métis.<sup>154</sup>

Source: Hall, D. J. (2006). *North-West Territories (1870-1905)*. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

The *Manitoba Act* marked a legal resolution of the struggle for self-determination between people of the Red River Colony (a historic Métis Settlement) and the developing government of Canada. Through the provisions of the Act, 1.4 million acres was to be set-aside for future Métis generations. The Act contained protections for the region's Métis called the "Scrip System," which was the process by which Métis could acquire title to their lands or money scrips ranging from 160 acres/dollars to 240 acres/dollars for each Métis child born prior to July 15, 1870. In practice, however, the claim process became one of the most flawed and corrupt policies for Indigenous people and led to the systematic loss of land for Métis in several ways:

- The "Scrip System" allocated Métis with the promised land or money. Unlike First Nations, Métis were not allowed to create a reserve land holding system or live in family-based block settlements, something that may have made it easier for the Métis to maintain their collective rights. Instead, to

<sup>153</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2020). *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Canada*. OECD Publishing.

<sup>154</sup> Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research. *Timeline of Métis History*.



receive scrip, each Métis had to individually surrender their Aboriginal title to the land, making it fundamentally different than the treaty process, which maintained the First Nations' collective rights.

- Individual Land Scrip certificates were distributed to recipients in diverse locales, often several kilometres from friends and family. This prevented the development of Métis bloc settlements in the Prairie West, which may have preserved the Métis land base. Also, because the land divided the community, families often opted to sell their certificates to remain close to friends and family.
- The land allotted did not meet the needs of the Métis as they were on marginal land with no access to woods and water, which was an integral component of the familiar Red River farming system.<sup>155</sup> As a result, many Métis left their allotment and moved on to more suitable farming land in the Northwest.
- Land speculators sought to take land scrip from the Métis through fraudulent or other means of coercion. Speculators or land swindlers would establish themselves beside the claim officials' office and use "copious amounts of alcohol to help expedite dealings would abound."<sup>156</sup> The Métis did not understand the ramifications of the deals they were making, especially as the allotment could be valued as much as 20 times greater than the original scrip value. Speculators would even hire people to "act as the Métis scrip holders" in court to secure the transfer of the valuable land to their possession.
- Other Métis who did keep their land often later lost their homesteads as they were unable to pay the high taxes that were imposed on these pieces of land.

For the government, the scrip system was a way to extinguish Indigenous title to the land, just as treaties had done for First Nations. Of the roughly 140,000 acres of land scrip issued in Saskatchewan, only 1% remained in Métis hands by the end of the process.

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<sup>155</sup> Muzyka, K. (2019, April 25). *What's Métis scrip? North America's 'largest land swindle,' says Indigenous lawyer.* CBC News.

<sup>156</sup> Houle, R. (2016, June 28). *Richard Henry Secord and Métis Scrip Speculation.* History Museum Edmonton.

## Métis Settlements and Land

In 1978, the MMF, a federally recognized Métis Government, hired a historian at the University of Manitoba to research Métis land claims, and he argued that the *Manitoba Act* was “a gesture,” but the intent was to prevent Métis from claiming title to the land under sections 31 and 32 of the legislation. The case went to the Supreme Court and in 2013 it ruled in favour with the descendants of Red River confirming the collective claim and saying: “That the federal Crown failed to implement the land grant provision set out in s. 31 of the *Manitoba Act*.” This represents 5565 square kilometres for around 7000 children of Red River Métis in an area that now includes the city of Winnipeg. The resolution of this finding regarding legal access to these lands is not determined at the time of writing.

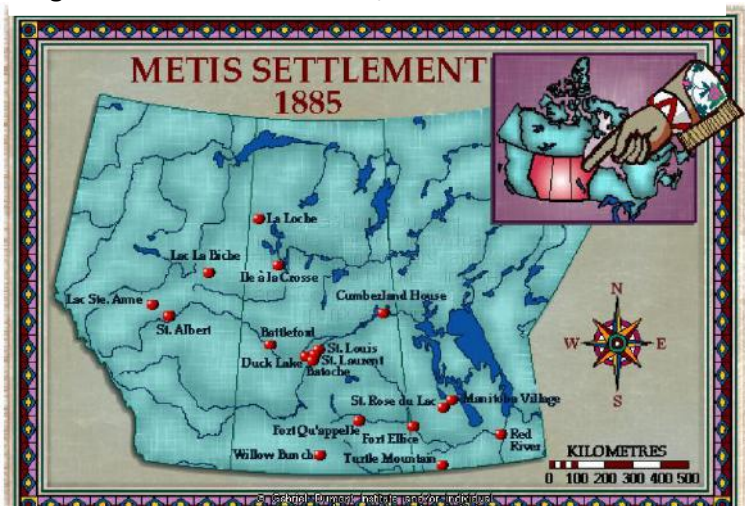
In Alberta, earlier legislation under the Métis Alberta Settlement came into effect in the late 1930s and 1940s, when the Alberta government introduced the *Métis Betterment Act*, which resulted in a land settlement. This created the first Métis land bases in Canada, establishing the new communities of Keg River (Paddle Prairie), Big Prairie (Utikumia), East Prairie, Pigeon Lake, Marlboro, Goodfish Lake, Sidebert Lake, Wolf Lake, Cold Lake, Fishing Lake, and Elizabeth.

On November 1, 1990, the Alberta government enacted legislation to enable Métis ownership and self-government on Alberta’s Métis Settlement Lands. This was the first comprehensive rights plan for Indigenous Peoples to be enacted by a provincial legislature in the twentieth century.

Since the 1990’s, many Métis land claims have seen settlements. For instance, in 1993, the Sahtu Dene signed a Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement with the Métis, which gave title to over 40,000 square kilometers of land in the Northwest Territories. In 1994, the MN-S submitted a claim for much of northwestern Saskatchewan, with a focus on the primarily Métis communities of Ile a La Crosse, Beauval, Buffalo Narrows, and Pine House Lake. This is a resource-rich region containing the largest portion of the province’s forestry industry, some mining activity, and considerable culturally significant fauna such as moose and black bear. The MN-S posits that settlement of this claim would provide the members of the MN-S with solid economic activities for generations.

In 2023, to the agreement between the MNO, MNA, MN-S, and the Federal government recognizes these Nations as rightful governments. This agreement opens up the possibility of additional negotiations and compensation for land that was taken.

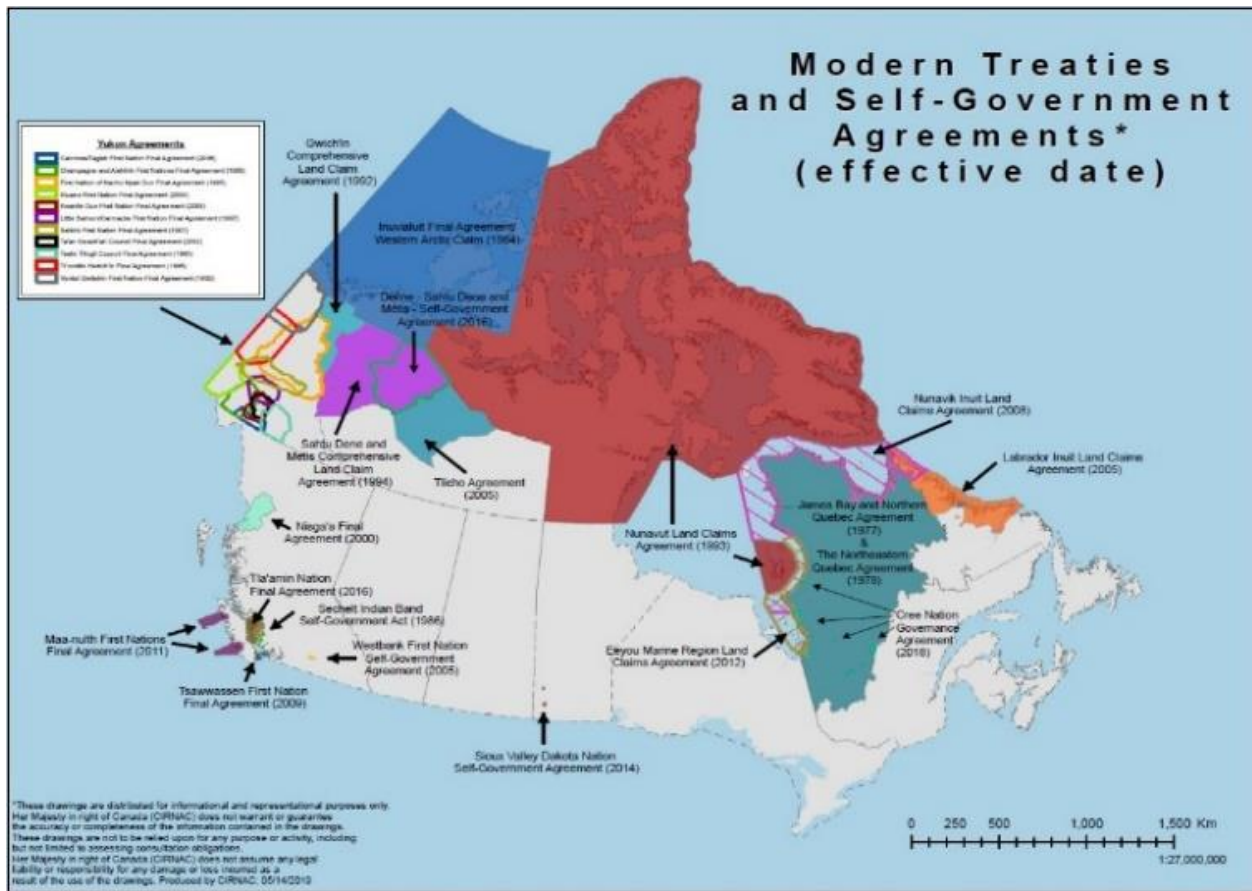
**Figure 66: Metis Settlements, 1885**



Source: Gabriel Dumont Institute

## Comprehensive Land Claim and Self-government Agreements

**Figure 67: Modern Treaties and Self-Government Agreements**



Source: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada

Comprehensive land claims are based on the assertion of continuing Indigenous rights and/or title to lands and natural resources. These claims are based on the traditional use and occupancy of land by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit who did not sign treaties. Since 1975, Canada and its negotiating partners have signed twenty-six modern treaties with Indigenous groups (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) in Canada (Figure 67), and eighteen agreements which contain self-government provisions or associated self-government agreements (three standalone self-government agreements in 2022).<sup>157</sup>

Inuit have negotiated modern treaties in all four of their territories (Nunavut, Nunavik, Nunatsiavut and Inuvialuit)<sup>158</sup> and there are self-government agreements in two regions (Nunavut and in Nunatsiavut). In early 2024, Quebec and the government of Nunavik agreed to enter into talks to move the region towards self-government<sup>159</sup> and the Inuvialuit region has a self-government agreement in principle<sup>160</sup>.

<sup>157</sup> Whitecap Dakota First Nation signed a Self-Government Agreement in May 2023 with the Federal government

<sup>158</sup> Does not include the Métis settlements located in Alberta

<sup>159</sup> Howitt, M. (2023, December 21). *Makivik, Quebec sign agreement for talks on self-government*. Nunatsiaq News.

<sup>160</sup> Inuvialuit Regional Corporation. (2024). *Self-government*.

## Inuit Land Claim Agreements

The history of the Inuit in the Arctic region is long. For 5,000 years, Inuit have occupied the territory from Russia to Greenland. The region was largely ignored by the early settlers to Canada because of the difficulty to access and the climate, so it was not until the 1950s that the Canadian government turned its sights on exerting sovereignty over the region. At this time, Inuit were moved into permanent settlements by the federal government, who promised access to education, healthcare, and material attractions of the modern world. Despite these promises, access to appropriate health care has been limited and, in many cases, the education that was provided was at residential schools, which removed children from their families and had the goal of assimilating Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture.

In terms of land claims, scholars have pointed out that it was Inuit who initiated the tone and direction of land claim settlement agreements in the 1970s. In a “Policy Options” document related to the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, Terry Fenge and Paul Quassa write “Inuit who were enfranchised federally only in 1960 and who were largely seminomadic until the early to mid-1960s and had very few formally educated leaders, successfully negotiated a modern treaty that literally changed forever the face of Canada.” Being sent to residential school in Churchill, many young Inuit leaders met and, in the 1970s, together initiated the Inuit land claims “movement” and the Nunavut project. Fenge and Quassa point out that “[t]he newly educated and increasingly politically active Inuit leadership rejected Jean Chrétien’s 1969 White Paper proposing assimilation of Aboriginal people into the larger Canadian collective. They saw the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act as a more appropriate model for Inuit and Arctic Canada.”<sup>161</sup>

As a result of these efforts, along with work with the Quebec Cree, the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement* of 1975 was negotiated and settled largely in response to the threat of hydroelectrical development.<sup>162</sup> For the Nunavimmiut, the Inuit of Northern Quebec, the agreement resulted in \$90 million in compensation, as well as provisions for hunting and fishing rights and the creation of governance institutions, including the establishment of the Makivik Corporation and the KRG.<sup>163</sup> While for many Nunavimmiut, there was the expectation that this deal would result in immediate economic benefits for the community, that has not been realized. Resource development opportunities have been limited due to the remoteness of the region and the economic organizations established to manage investment of the settlement monies were based more on profit generation through secure investments than through local business activities. This has meant that economic benefits have in fact taken some time to appear in the communities.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Fenge, T. & Quassa, P. (2009, July 1). *Negotiating and implementing the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement*. Policy Options.

<sup>162</sup> The discovery of Natural resources was also a significant motivating force in coming to land claim agreement. Nunatsiavut’s land claim was “fast tracked” after the discovery of the Voisey’s Bay nickel deposit.

<sup>163</sup> Del. A. M. (2018). *Inuit Compromise and Resurgence: The Legacies of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement*. [Thesis, University of Washington].

<sup>164</sup> ARA Consulting Group Inc. (1995). *Social and Economic Impacts of Aboriginal Land Claim Settlements: A Case Study Analysis Final Report*. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, Province of British Columbia & Federal Treaty Negotiations Office, Government of Canada.

Figure 68: Inuit Territories and Comprehensive Claim Agreements

## INUIT TERRITORIES AND COMPREHENSIVE CLAIM AGREEMENTS



### Nunavik (Quebec)

- Nunavik was the first modern comprehensive land claims agreement in Canada, called the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, signed in Quebec City on November 11, 1975.
- It was negotiated after Quebec announced its intention to develop the hydroelectric James Bay Project without consultation or consent from Inuit and Cree who lived in the area.
- The two communities took Quebec to court and won an interlocutory injunction in 1973.
- Some 11,000 Inuit live in 14 communities along the eastern coast of Hudson's Bay and Hudson Strait. The largest community in the region is Kuujuaq, with a population of approximately 1,800.

### Inuvialuit Settlement Region (Northwest Territories)

- 1984 settled a comprehensive land claims agreement, giving surface and subsurface (mining) rights to most of the region
- ensures environmental protection, harvesting rights and Inuvialuit participation and support in many economic development initiatives.
- Economic focus on oil and gas development, diamond mining and transportation
- on the verge of significant economic development in the construction of a major natural gas pipeline.

### Nunatsiavut (Labrador)

- On December 6, 2001, an amendment to the Canadian Constitution, changed Newfoundland's name to Newfoundland and Labrador, acknowledging the distinction of the Labrador region.
- The Inuit region of Labrador is called Nunatsiavut. The Government officially came into being on December 1, 2005.
- It has responsibility for economic development planning, preserving Inuit culture and implementing social programs.
- Approximately 2,300 Inuit live along the Labrador coast, primarily in five communities. Nain is the biggest Inuit community in Labrador with a population of 1,100.
- Nunatsiavut's biggest employer, but the Voisey's Bay nickel mine is expected to boost the local economy in years to come by employing Inuit from nearby areas.

### Nunavut

- April 1, 1999, Nunavut became Canada's newest territory.
- Once part of the Northwest Territories, is one-fifth of Canada's landmass.
- Some 27,000 Inuit reside in 26 communities, with Iqaluit as its capital.
- Inuktitut is an official language of government, along with French, English and Inuinnaqtun.
- Nunavut's economy, like that of the other regions, is based on renewable resources, arts and crafts, both on and offshore fisheries and tourism.
- Government is the largest employer in the territory, followed closely by the private sector and service industries.
- Upon its creation, Nunavut inherited legislation from the Northwest Territories government but is in the process of drafting a slate of new bills. Made-in-Nunavut laws include an Education Act, Official Languages Act and Inuit Language Protection Act.

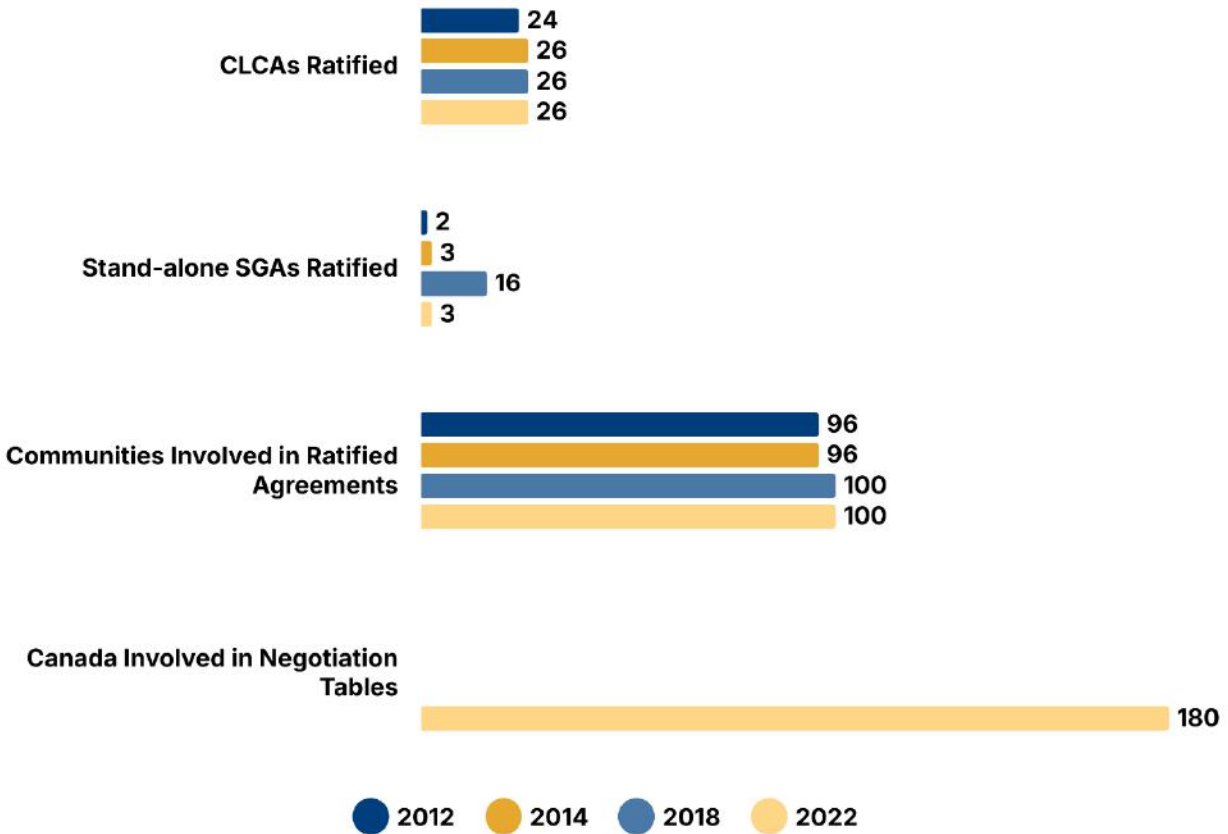
\*\*\* for a more detailed map of the Inuit Nunangat, please refer to: Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2019, April 4). *Inuit Nunangat Map*.

In addition, it was at this time that the idea of Nunavut as a distinct Inuit territory first emerged, and work began to establish it as such. It took over 25 years of negotiation for Nunavut to come to fruition formally in 1999. Now almost 50 years after these initial negotiations, Inuit remain the largest non-Crown landowners in Canada, as their land claims agreements make up the Inuit Nunangat, which is a geographic, cultural, and political region in Canada comprised of 4 distinct territories: the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut (Figure 68). The agreements signed from 1975 to 2005<sup>165</sup> grant the territorial governments extensive surface, subsurface, onshore, and offshore rights in the North, as well as established rights to decision-making responsibilities regarding the management of the land and waters, bringing significant economic development benefits and, for the Nunatsiavut, self-government agreements.

<sup>165</sup> Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. (2024, February 20). *Inuit*. Government of Canada.

Figure 69: Number of Ratified Comprehensive Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements, 2012 to 2022

## Number of Ratified Comprehensive Land Claim and Self-Government Agreements, 2012 to 2022



Source: CIRNAC Custom Table

The change in the relationship between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples came after the 1973 *Calder v. British Columbia* decision, which first acknowledged enduring Indigenous rights in Canada. In response, the Government of Canada accepted the legitimacy of both comprehensive land claims and specific claims.

- **Comprehensive land claims:** settlements to include lands and implementation of other rights based on “traditional” use and occupancy of lands, where rights have not already been addressed by treaty.
- **Specific claims:** settlements to address Crown wrongdoing related to treaty fulfillment and management of Indigenous land and other assets (*Statement on Claims of Indian and Inuit People*).

The Canadian government stated that the Comprehensive Land Claims Policy stipulates that land claims may be negotiated with Indigenous groups in areas where claims to title have not been addressed by

treaty or through other legal means. These modern treaties recognize the rights of Indigenous people to ownership of over 600,000 square kilometres of land (almost the size of Manitoba). ITK has also determined the land and coastline of Inuit Nunangat makes up about 40% of Canada's land area and 72% of the country's coastline.<sup>166</sup>

To date, these Comprehensive Claim Agreements have had real impact, providing:<sup>167</sup>

- Capital transfers of over \$3.2 billion;
- Protection of traditional ways of life;
- Access to resource development opportunities;
- Participation in land and resources management decisions; and,
- Associated self-government rights and political recognition.

### Devolution Process

The devolution process is the process by which the federal government transfers land, responsibility and control back to the original landowners. This process is specific to the North and has begun to transfer responsibility for things like health, housing, and land to the territorial governments since the 1960s.

The devolution process has been completed in all three territories, with the most recent being Nunavut's devolution agreement coming into effect on April 1, 2024. With the devolution agreement concluding 25 years after Nunavut become a territory, this particular agreement signifies the long struggle for Indigenous control for decisions related to land, waters, and resources.

The post-devolution process transfer period is also outlined in these agreements and ensures that the human resources aspect of the transfer is controlled by Indigenous groups to ensure that Indigenous employees are represented within territorial governments and involved in making final decisions related to oil, gas, minerals, and other resources in the territories. This is an important aspect of ensuring that territorial governments receive the royalties owed to them related to development projects.

### Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement

On January 18, 2024, the Government of Canada, the Government of Nunavut, and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated signed the Nunavut Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement. This agreement is the largest land transfer in Canada's history which designates decision making power to Nunavut and its residents regarding public lands, freshwater, and non-renewable resources. This step towards self-determination will create Northern-led jobs, opportunities, and investments, allow Nunavut citizens to leverage the benefits of resource development, and overall advance economic prosperity for the people of Nunavut. The transfer of responsibilities is set to be completed by April 1, 2027.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2023, February 3). *Inuit Nunangat Land And Coastline*.

<sup>167</sup> For more details on each Modern Treaty, visit: Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. (2016, August 16). *General Briefing Note on Canada's Self-government and Comprehensive Land Claims Policies and the Status of Negotiations*. Government of Canada.

<sup>168</sup> Prime Minister of Canada, (2024, January 18). *Government of Canada, Government of Nunavut, and Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated reach final agreement on the devolution of Nunavut*.

## Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-determination Tables

While there has been no additional modern treaties and self-government agreements signed since the 2019 *IEPR*, Canada has been on a different path towards recognizing Indigenous rights and self-determination. Since 2017, the government of Canada has worked with Indigenous groups to explore new ways to advance those rights and self-determination through the establishment of the Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination Tables (RIRSD).<sup>169</sup>

These discussions are community-driven and respond to the rights, needs, and interests of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis groups where current federal policies (such as Comprehensive Land Claims Policy or Inherent Rights-Policy) have historically failed to do so. According to the Government of Canada (2020), “the goal is to bring greater flexibility to negotiations based on the recognition of rights, respect, cooperation and partnership.” Under this approach, Canada and Indigenous communities move forward through co-developed, incremental types of agreements (Letters of Understanding, Memoranda of Understanding and Framework Agreement).

To date, Canada has signed eighteen agreements through the RIRSD process (Table 6). The subject of the agreements varies considerably (some include harvesting rights, parks management, core governance and so on). In addition to those already signed agreements, there are currently 186 ongoing and active negotiation tables (Table 7), and that number has increased significantly since 2012 (54 active negotiations). Of those 186 active negotiations, 171 pertain to First Nations, eight to Métis, and six to Inuit.

**Table 6: List of signed RIRSD Agreements**

List of Concluded RIRSD Agreements (18) as of October 2022:
1. Tsilhqot'in Reconciliation Agreement (2019)
2. Heiltsuk Incremental House Post Agreement (2019)
3. Manitoba Métis Federation Interim Fiscal Financing Agreement (2018)
4. Métis Nation of Ontario Recognition of Core Governance Agreement (2019)
5. Métis Nation of Alberta Recognition of Core Governance Agreement (2019)
6. Métis Nation of Saskatchewan Recognition of Core Governance Agreement (2019)
7. Coastal First Nation Fisheries Agreement (2019)
8. Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk (formerly Maliseet of Viger) 10-year Renewable Fisheries Resources Agreement (2019)
9. Elsipogtog and Esgenoopetitj Fisheries Subgroup - Interim Fisheries Implementation Agreement (2019)
10. Manitoba Métis Self-Government Recognition and Implementation Agreement (2021)

<sup>169</sup> CIRNAC, 2020



11. Listuguj: Mi'gmaq of the Gaspé region of Quebec - Fish RRA - 2021
12. Tsleil Waututh Interim Recognition Agreement (Burrard Inlet Environmental Science and Stewardship Agreement)
13. Pheasant Rump Nakota RRA
14. Ocean Man RRA
15. Wolastoqiyik Wahsipekuk
16. Innu of Labrador - Incremental Treaty Agreement on Parks and Fisheries
17. Siksika Land Claim Settlement (April 7, 2022)
18. Haida Good Faith Measures FTA (advanced payments transfer)

Source: CIRNAC Internal Data.

**Table 7: Number of Negotiation Tables since 2012**

Year	# Tables by Distinction Group			Total
	First Nations	Inuit	Métis	
2012	53	2	2	<b>57</b>
2014	55	2	2	<b>59</b>
2018	127	4	8	<b>139</b>
Current	172	6	8	<b>186</b>

Source: CIRNAC, 2023

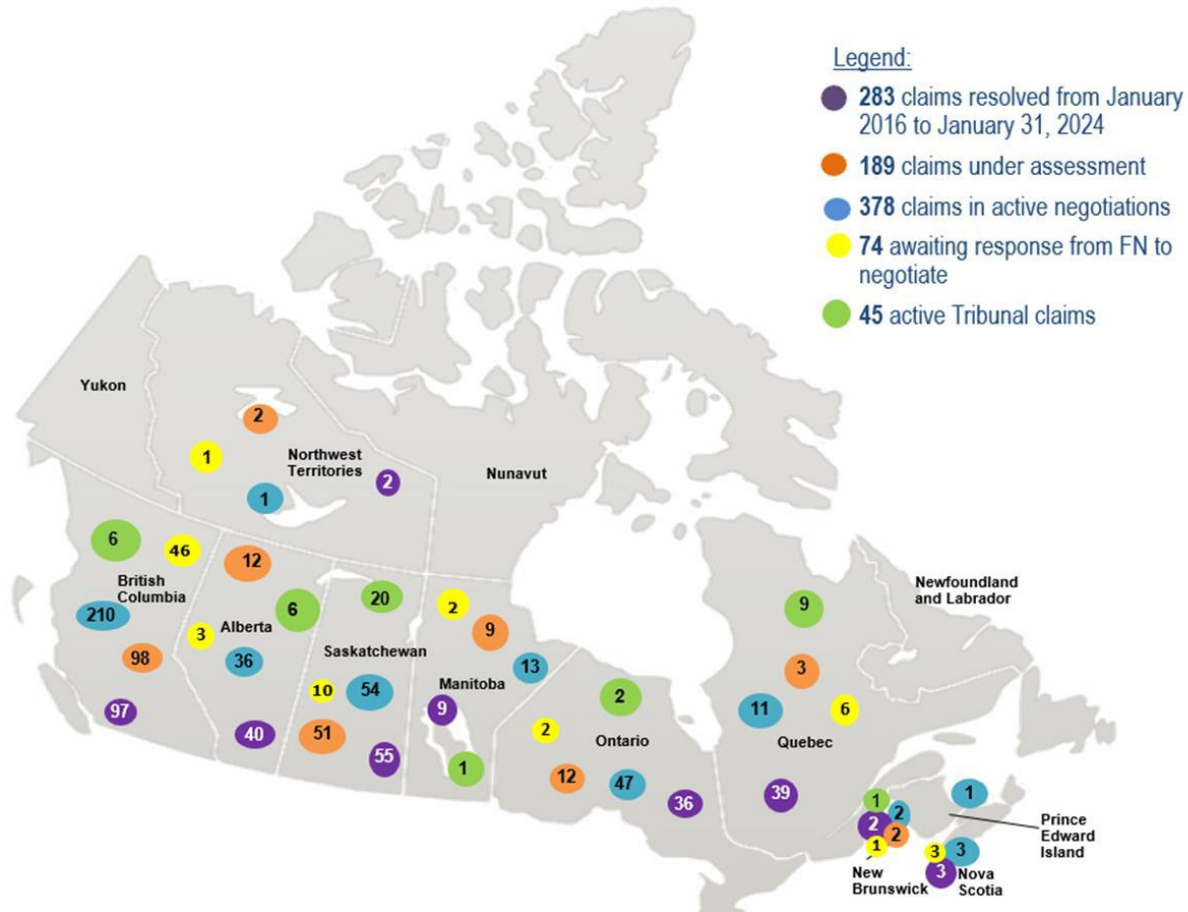
### Specific Claims

Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) outlines that Specific Claims are based on the “Honour of the Crown and its fiduciary obligations to First Nations based on the Indian Act.” This means that First Nations can seek a claim against the government when they have either:

1. demonstrated that the Canadian government has not properly implemented their treaty; or,
2. demonstrated that the government has violated the Indian Act in the administration of their reserve lands or trust funds, when there was no treaty signed.

Specific Claims also differ from Modern Treaties as rights are recognized as pre-existing, meaning that the agreements are not final settlements, but living agreements. Specific claims settlement funds provide First Nations with capital that can be invested in community and economic development that can benefit First Nations and their neighbours. These settlement amounts can be a vital catalyst for economic and social development in First Nations Communities. In contrast, modern treaties are particularly focused on funding.

Figure 70: Specific Claims Inventory as of January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024



Source: CIRNAC Internal Data.

These agreements hold a significant economic development opportunity for communities. During the period between the inception of the program in 1973 and January 31, 2024, 688 claims, totaling \$13.9 billion in compensation, have been settled through negotiations. Most recently, from January 1st, 2016, to January 31, 2024, 278 claims have been resolved for close to \$9.9 billion in compensation (Figure 70).

How have First Nations used their settlement agreements? Research in this area is only beginning, but First Nations typically make use of their settlement monies in a combination of the following:

- To **purchase land**;
- To **establish a trust**;<sup>170</sup>
- To **use as capital** to start up, expand or acquire a community-owned business, or to support individual First Nation members in their efforts to do so; and,
- To **distribute directly to members** where nations provide a portion of settlement monies to community members in a “per capita distribution,” to use as they like.<sup>171</sup>

<sup>170</sup> Up until 2005, the federal government required First Nations to establish a trust agreement in the negotiation phase.

<sup>171</sup> Bruhn, J. (2021). *Uses and Impacts of Specific Claim Settlement Funds: A Review of the Literature*. Stratéjuste Canada.

There have been case studies in the past, including one conducted by NIEDB, which studied First Nations Communities that have used the funds from Specific Claims for economic development. One study by the Fraser Institute in 2017 suggested there was little statistical evidence that Specific Claims made a difference in the economic outlook of the recipient Nations. There is one notable exception to this. “Specifically, a small group of Saskatchewan First Nations who had used their settlement funds to purchase urban land to add to their reserve and pursued an “aggressive business strategy” (opening such things as casinos or industrial or commercial parks) did experience measurable improvement of their CWB over time. Collectively, the 8 First Nations moved from an average CWB score of 41 in 1981 to 58 in 2011.”<sup>172</sup>

### Treaty Land Entitlement

Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) was a policy adoption in Saskatchewan and Manitoba aimed at resolving Specific Claims. This was first adopted proactively in 1992 when an agreement was signed with the province of Saskatchewan, the Government of Canada, and 25 First Nations. The agreement assured a more proactive approach by the province to ensure First Nations receive the land allotment promised when they signed the treaties as a Specific Claim. Under the agreement, Canada and Saskatchewan committed to providing First Nations with \$440 million over 12 years to buy land, mineral rights, and improvements.<sup>173</sup> In 1997, Canada, the Government of Manitoba, and 19 Manitoba First Nations followed suit and also signed a TLE Framework Agreement for Manitoba.

### Urban Reserves

As of 2017, there were more than 120 urban reserves across Canada, most of them located in the two provinces. If they wish, First Nations in other provinces may use their claims to purchase land and have it converted to reserve land through the additions to reserve process.<sup>174</sup> Alternatively, for strategic reasons, they could continue owning the land purchased under fee simple title.

Internal data provided by CIRNAC show that the number of settlements for Specific Claims has increased steadily over the last 15 years since the Economic Benchmarking report was started (Figure 71). Most claims filed by First Nations result in an offer from Canada to negotiate compensation. The proportion of claims accepted for negotiation has increased from 55% in 2014-15 to around 92% in 2022-23.

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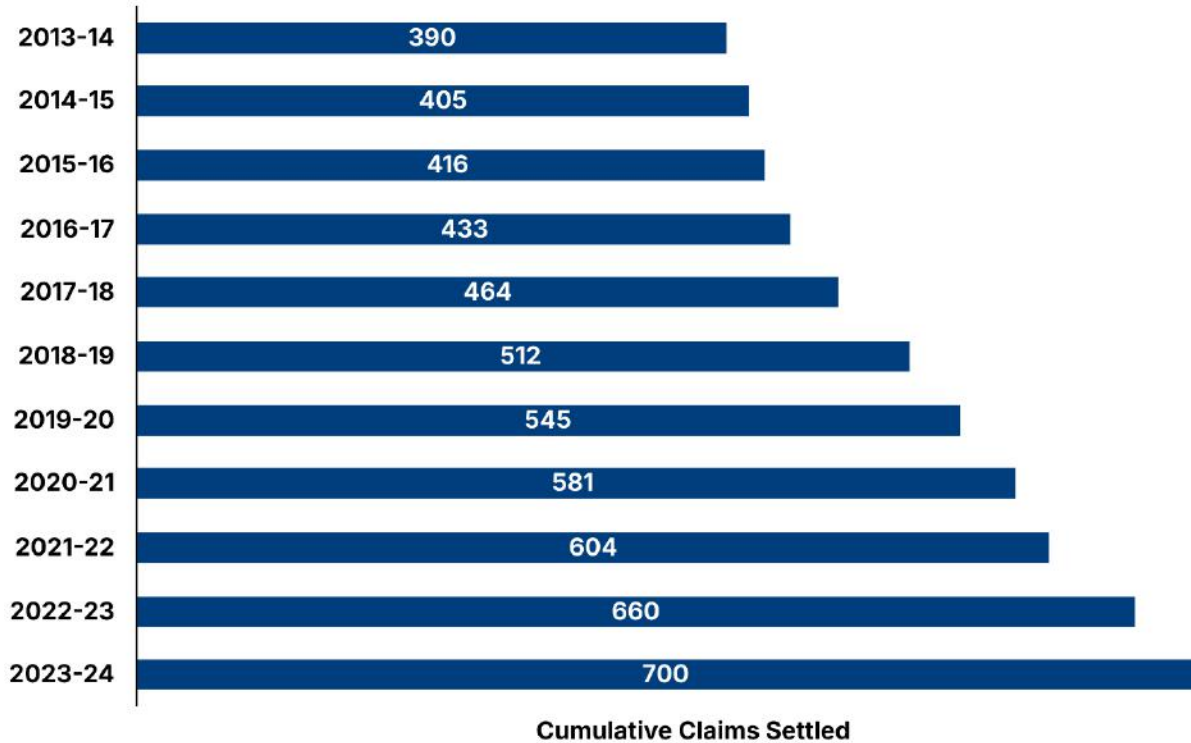
<sup>172</sup> Fraser Institute. (2018, June 21). *Specific Claims and the Well-Being of First Nations*.

<sup>173</sup> Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2017).

<sup>174</sup> INAC, 2017.

Figure 71: Total Settlements per Fiscal Year from June 2013 to June 2023

## Total Settlements per Fiscal Year from June 2013 to June 2023



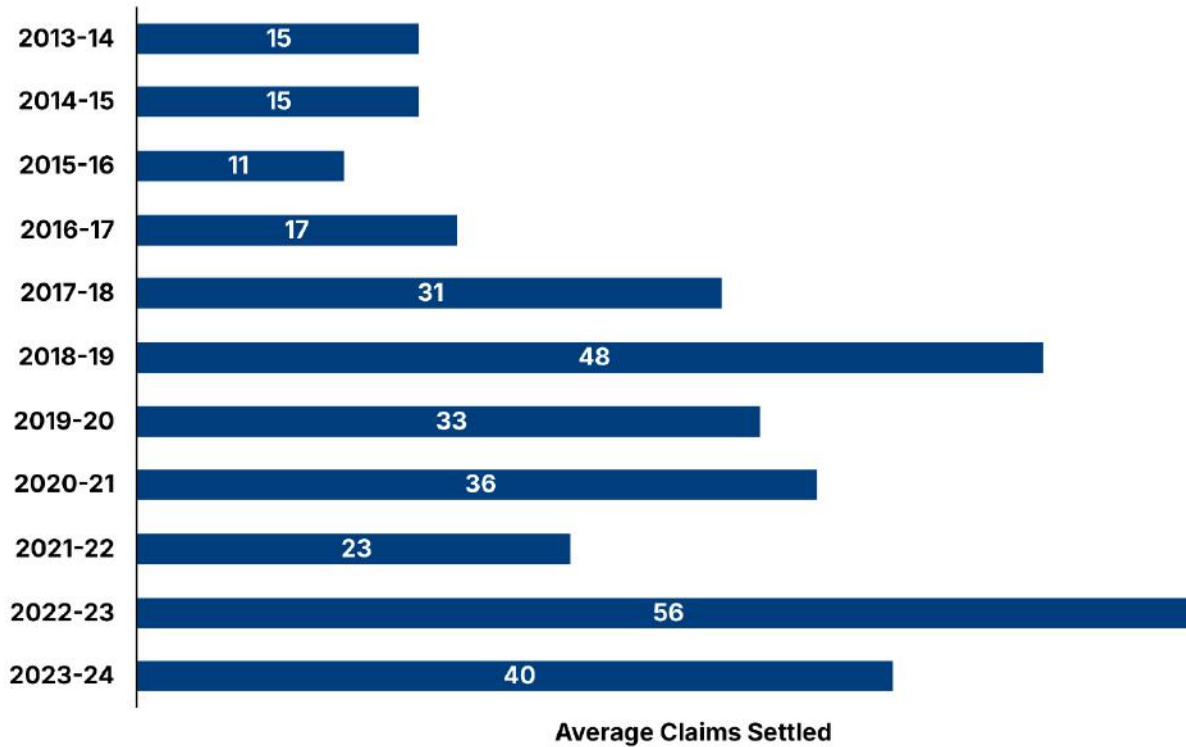
Source: CIRNA Presentation 2019, and Specific Claims Bimonthly Fact sheet October 2023

The pace of claims resolution has also greatly increased. From 2015 to 2017, an average of 15 claims per year were resolved. In 2022-23, a record 56 claims were resolved, for a total amount of \$3.5 billion in compensation (Figure 72).

It is important to note that these specific claims may not solely be specific to lands-related issues.

Figure 72: Average Number of Specific Claims Settlements per Fiscal Year from 2013 to 2023

## Average Number of Specific Claims Settlements per Fiscal Year from 2013 to 2023



Source: CIRNA Internal Data, 2023

### First Nations Land Management (FNLMA) Regime

Reserve lands are held by the Government of Canada (Crown) on behalf of First Nations for the use and benefit of First Nations. As a result, the Federal Government and First Nation Governments are each responsible for managing different aspects of reserve lands and resources. In 1991, a group of 14 First Nations proposed to allow a departure from the land and resources-related provisions of the *Indian Act* and, in 1996, concluded the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management ('Framework Agreement' hereafter) with the Crown. The *First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA)* was enacted in 1999 to supplant the forty-four land management provisions of the *Indian Act*, enabling First Nations to assume administration and control over their reserve lands, develop Land Codes, and hold law-making authority respecting the conservation, protection, management, development, possession, and use of First Nations lands. First Nations entering the new land management regime also signed onto the Framework Agreement ('signatory' First Nations).

Through the *FNLMA*, First Nations may exercise land management authority independent of the Crown, and make timely business and administrative decisions to accelerate their land use planning, resource management, and economic development activities. Based on an initial environmental assessment, only those lands found to be in an environmentally sound condition are brought under the FNLMA regime,

with the land base entering the new regime legally described in a Land Description Report. Along with the enhanced powers, signatory First Nations bear the liability and cost of their own environmental and land management reviews and processes, with limited financial support under the opt-in regime.

Since its inception in 1999, the *FNLMA* has made significant benefits available to First Nations Communities. By facilitating the assumption of control and decision-making over their reserve lands, and reducing timelines for land transactions, the Act aimed to improve the economic and social conditions of these communities. For example, it has provided a tool for self-government, a way to increase economic development, and it has allowed First Nations to create and implement their own laws and regulations, grounded in the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management, and reflecting their traditional customs, ways of life, and knowledge.

The Framework Agreement regime is intended to provide many benefits for First Nations, including:

- Incorporating culturally rooted means of dealing with lands, including community dispute resolution;
- Operating independently of ministerial guarantees;
- Creating their own laws that govern the environment, including nuisance laws and trespass laws;
- Guiding development through integrated land use plans, environmental legislations, waste management plans aligned with community values, and people's vision for their community;
- Shortening the time to approve lands for economic development purposes;
- Creating opportunities for entrepreneurship;
- Enabling their governments and members to create businesses in the local community;
- Increasing their ability to create direct relationships with neighbouring non-Indigenous communities; and,
- Receiving support from associated FNLMA First Nations Communities and through a resource centre.

Multiple factors must be considered to determine with certainty whether the adoption of the FNLMA initiative has brought about the promised improvements in and of itself. There are also questions regarding the best ways to bring laws enacted by a signatory First Nation into practice, including the effective enforcement of provisions and consequences for non-compliance. In any case, the shift from the *Indian Act* to the *FNLMA* lands regime is of practical and symbolic significance. By explicitly recognizing First Nations as law-making bodies that control their physical environment and determine how that environment is used, *FNLMA* has potential to be powerfully transformative. The thirty-year old experiment is part of an evolving process of reclaiming and asserting jurisdiction over reserve lands. For communities that have been historically denied control of their lands by *Indian Act* provisions, reinstating agency and re-inhabiting the inherent right of self-determination that Nations have always exercised opens the possibility of Nations re-shaping their environment and their economic future.

On December 13, 2018, the Framework Agreement was amended to formally include a commitment to the *UN Declaration*, a commitment to implement its provisions “in a manner consistent with the Canadian Constitution.”<sup>175</sup> In November 2022, the *FNLMA* was repealed, and replaced with the *Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management Act*, essentially giving the Framework Agreement the force of law, and explicitly stating its importance as a guiding framework. The departure from the *FNLMA* and realignment with the Agreement means that, should parties decide that amendments to the Framework Agreement are required, the process of incorporating those amendments will be much less onerous and time-consuming than would be required to amend the former *FNLMA*. The freedom to determine the most desirable path forward is now in control of the signatory First Nations, in agreement with the Crown, based on a recognition of the agency and independence of the parties.

#### Cleaning UP Contaminated Land

There is federal funding to address environmental contamination\* for lands under the Indian Act. The Contaminated Sites On Reserve Program (CSOR) is a national initiative that supports the assessment and remediation of contaminated sites on reserve lands, and lands under “the Department's custodial responsibility. “

As of February 2021, there are two thousand sites in the Contaminated Sites inventory. There were plans to undertake 180 assessments and 475 remediation activities, across approximately 250 communities from 2020-2025

Since the program began, over 2,500 sites have been closed with 357 sites being completely remediated.

For contaminated sites in Nunavut: The Northern Contaminated Sites Program in Iqaluit oversees the remediation and there are approximately eighty-five identified contaminated and waste sites in Nunavut in various stages of remediation with a variety of priorities.

\*Most sites were contaminated by fuel storage or solid waste.

The number of First Nations joining the FNLM initiative (through the development or operation of a land code) has increased from 131 in 2018 to 194 in November 2022. The number of First Nations that are operational increased from 75 in 2018 to 101 in 2022. (Figure 73). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2022, there has been a slowdown in the progression for some communities in the development of their land codes. However, despite the effects of the pandemic, 23 Nations have ratified their land codes since 2019, bringing the total number of operational FNLM communities to 101 (Figure 74).

The apparent trend toward increased adoption of the FNLM initiative from 2014 to 2022 bodes well for increased First Nations control of land management functions as a developing norm. However, it is significant that more than half of the 635 federally recognized First Nations remain under *Indian Act* lands provisions, with 58% not participating in either Reserve Lands and Environment Management Program (RLEMP) or the Framework Agreement. With RLEMP understood as a developmental program that is arguably nearing capacity, any potential new entrants must wait until existing First Nations join FNLM. Other challenges in the funding model for these land management reforms include an RLEMP

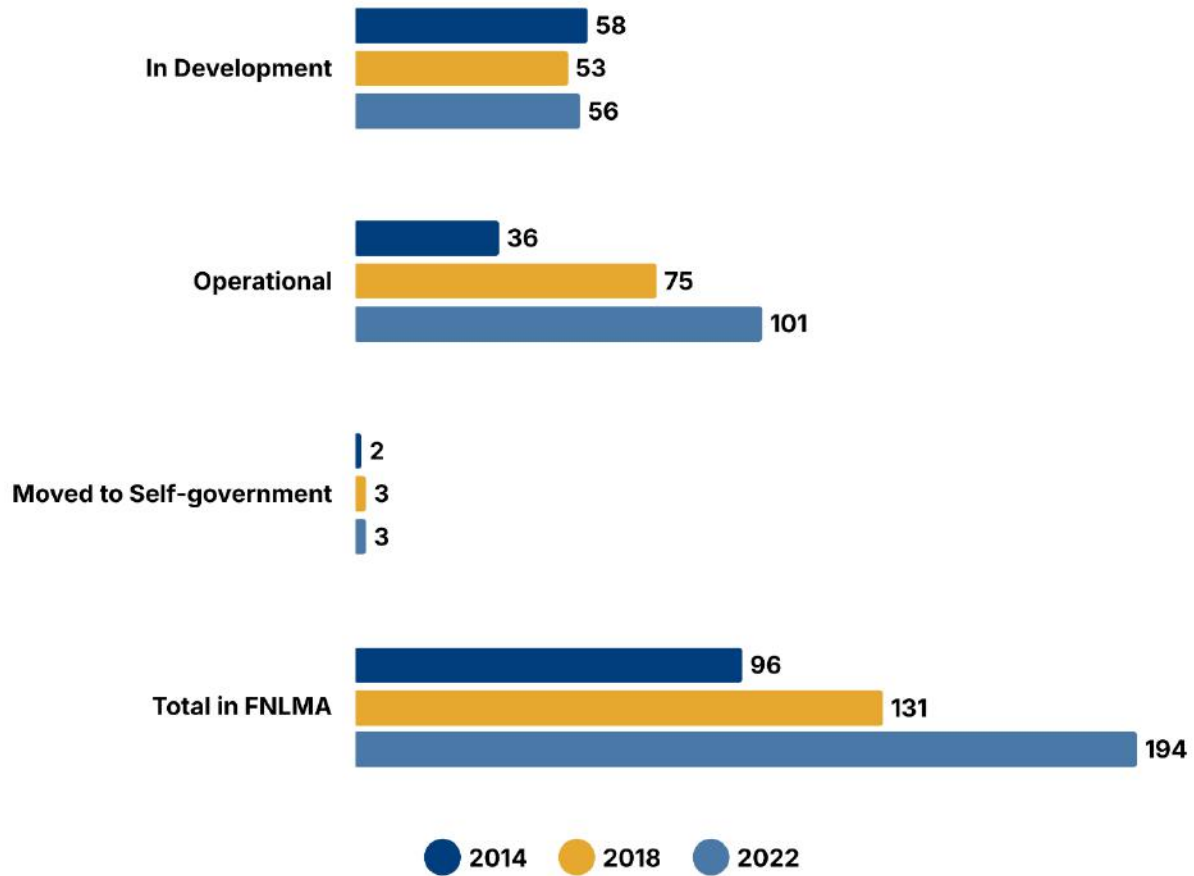
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<sup>175</sup> *Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management*. (1996).

funding formula perceived as outmoded and too heavily weighted towards the volume of transactions registered by the First Nation (Figure 75).<sup>176</sup>

**Figure 73: Number of First Nations in *First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA)* by Status, 2014, 2018 and 2022**

## Number of First Nations in FNLMA by Status, 2014, 2018 and 2022



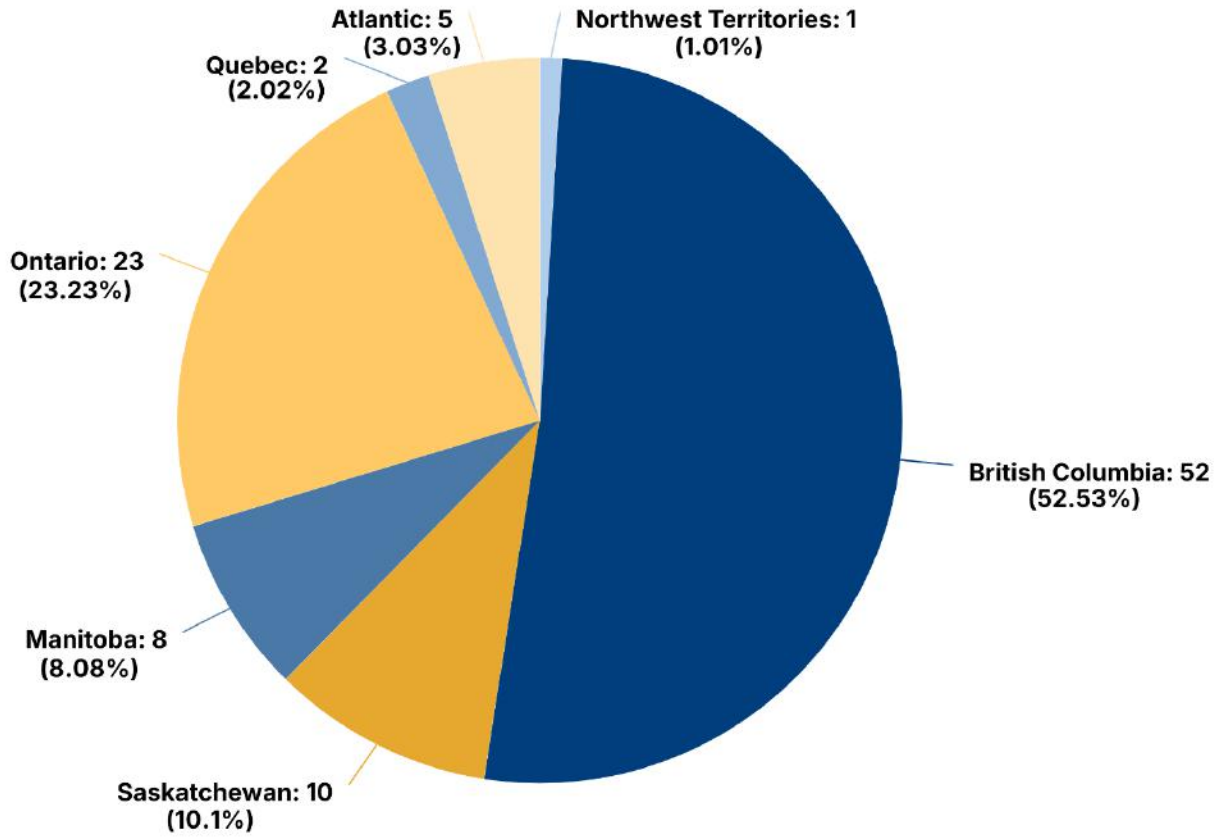
Source: INAC/ISC, 2018, 2023

<sup>176</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. Program data.



Figure 74: Number of Operational First Nations under FNLM by Region, April 2022

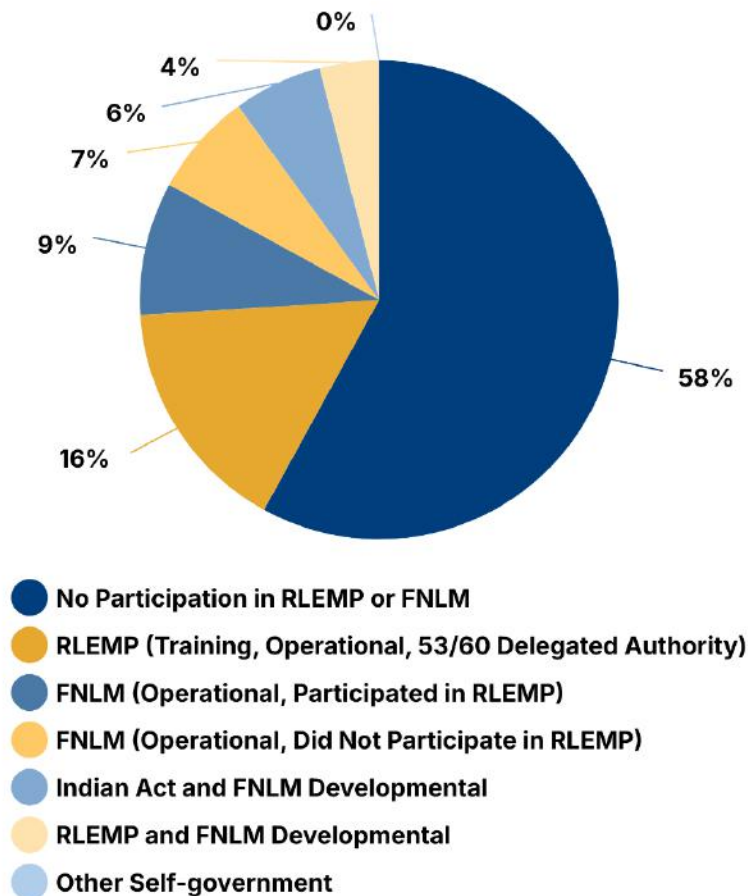
## Number of Operational First Nations under FNLM by Region, April 2022



Source: ISC Program data

Figure 75: Distribution of 635 First Nations' Participation in RLEMP and FNLM, May 2022

## Distribution of 635 First Nations' Participation in RLEMP and FNLM, May 2022



Source: ISC Program data

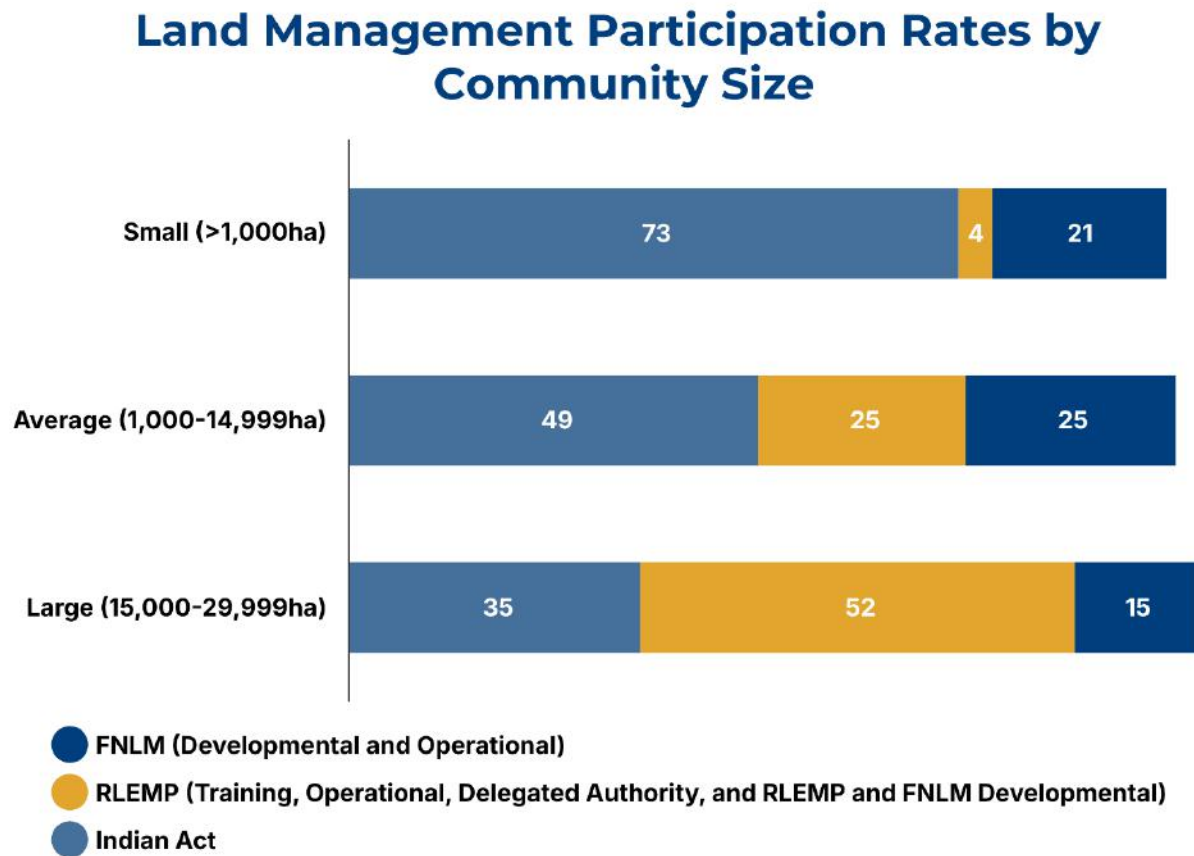
The potential difficulties of proceeding toward greater independence in land management may also involve a perception of uncertainty, on the part of First Nation members, of the complexity of the new responsibilities, such as environmental reviews and liability for existing lands issues, and local administrative capabilities, such as independence, and available funding. This uncertainty, or lack of confidence in local control, has been cited as a disincentive for accepting the initiative, causing some First Nations to choose to remain under the *Indian Act* lands regime. It also suggests that leaving the land management provisions of the *Indian Act* in favour of the Framework Agreement may not be a realistic choice suitable to all First Nations Communities. First Nations with less training and experience and less economic development potential may forego the opportunity to adopt local land management responsibilities until their membership perceives they have the required land management capacity.<sup>177</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Khan, K. (2001). *Land surveys on Indian Reserves: an inquiry into benefits*. University of Calgary.

In a similar vein, where community or Nation populations are small, remote, or where members reside in urban centres away from reserves, departure from *Indian Act* land-related provisions is not attractive simply due to lack of capacity.

Among the *Indian Act* lands regime and the two optional reforms, RLEMP and FNLM dominate (67% of First Nations) as the models most suited to First Nations with a larger land base (i.e., from 35,000 to 75,000 acres), whereas the *Indian Act* lands regime dominates for 73% of First Nations with a land base less than 2,475 acres in size (Figure 76).

**Figure 76: Land Management Participation Rates by Community Size**



Source: ISC Program data

#### RLEMP and FNLM Adoption as a Step Towards Self-government

The RLEMP prepares First Nations to undertake responsibilities such as land use planning, environmental management, and compliance monitoring on behalf of the Minister of ISC. RLEMP also builds capacity by providing core training and university courses that allow individuals to qualify for the Professional Land Management Certification Program. Through RLEMP, First Nations may progress through three levels of administrative responsibility under the *Indian Act*, receiving funding commensurate for each level. However, the available training funds may be applied to any training the First Nation deems useful to that role.

### First Nations Land Management Capacity

Many land issues exist within reserves. Perhaps the foremost is the insufficiency and quality of reserve land to meet community needs. These issues include the need to secure and demarcate land for housing and infrastructure, fragmentation of interests due to unresolved estates, the need to resolve land disputes among members, the role of informal/unrecorded interests in reserve lands, the devaluing of reserve land parcels relative to comparable off-reserve parcels, the role of certificates of possession in impeding development, and the susceptibility to flooding.

The management of Indigenous lands and waters has been the object of debate and reforms in the past 30 years in Canada. It is generally agreed that Indigenous groups who hold reserve lands and/or treaty lands should have more autonomy to manage their lands, and correspondingly more administrative, technical and financial capacity to do so. However, without increasing their financial and technical capacity, First Nations Communities may not have the ability to comply with regulations or may become unreasonably burdened by them.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2020). *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Canada*. OECD Publishing

To assess the degree of land management capacity among First Nations and Inuit governments, a 2011 study conducted by Surveyor General Branch of Natural Resources Canada queried 75 First Nations and Inuit members of either the National Aboriginal Land Managers Association (NALMA) or First Nations Alliance 4 Land Management (FN4LM). Of the sixty-three responses, thirty-one were spread across every province (save PEI), twelve were in BC, and 9 in Nunavut. This appears to be the only national study of survey and mapping capacity. Among its findings:

- One-third of respondents have staff working on surveying and mapping (including surveying, geographic information system, or Lands administration).
- 84% of First Nation's hire a Canada Lands Surveyor, as needed.
- Half of the respondents have adopted land use plans for their community or are now preparing such plans.
- The CWB score across the fifty-two communities averaged sixty-four, compared to the average CWB score for all Indigenous communities in Canada in 2011 of 56.
- Respondents who have staff working on surveying and mapping are, on average, three-times more remote than respondents who do not.
- The great majority of respondents (93%) were interested in a surveying/geomatics certification program.

Despite the small sample size relative to the number of Indigenous communities in Canada, the study was successfully used to advocate for increased land management capacity and supported the creation of the Certificate in Applied Land Management at the Vancouver Island University and the Tulo Centre for Indigenous Economics, administered by Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops. The Tulo certificate program began in 2018 and delivers training in surveying, mapping, boundary principles and land use planning; to date, it has produced thirty-one graduates: British Columbia (22), Alberta (4), Saskatchewan (2), Manitoba (1), Ontario (1), and Quebec (1). The program consisted of remote study in students' home communities, supplemented by periodic in-person sessions at Thompson Rivers University. Course delivery was via distance education during the pandemic.

It should also be noted that government reporting requirements for First Nations in terms of land surveys is higher and more rigorous than those faced by other governments, particularly municipalities

As well, a lack of local land management capacity has been cited<sup>179</sup> as a reason for First Nations not engaging with the *FN4LM*. However, this capacity gap is not limited to land management alone; Nations face reporting requirements that surpass those of comparable municipal governments, such as special purpose reports to various federal departments. The shortfall in overall administrative and regulatory capacity is a significant draw on the resources of many small First Nations.<sup>180</sup>

### First Nations Land Managers

For First Nations to meaningfully manage their lands, trained personnel are needed. Critical skills include the ability to read and extract information from topographic maps and survey plans, making measurements to identify potential lots for housing, land development, road and piping services, being able to represent a community's interests in interactions with land use planners, land surveyors, architects, and constructors from other levels of government and the private sector, and resolving

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<sup>179</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (Ibid).

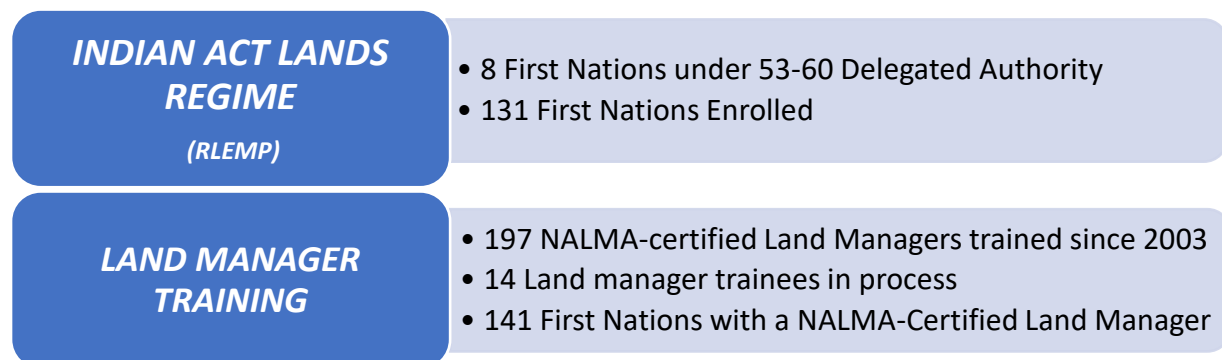
<sup>180</sup> Chartered Accountants of Canada. (2008). *Financial reporting by First Nations*.

disputes over ownership and use of land. Such skills are valuable in dealing with day-to-day land issues within a community, as well as interpreting and responding to time-limited invitations to respond to industrial proposals to use traditional lands for resource extraction or other development.

Developing First Nations land management capacity along with comprehensive community planning has been lauded as an important means of involving community members in a way that introduces First Nation residents to having a voice in control of their community lands. In addition, it provides a means for Indigenous Peoples to find meaningful employment in their communities. There are several different stages of land management (Figures 77 & 78):

1. '53/60' is the first stage or level of delegated lands authority which assigns the First Nation with the authority to prepare land transfer documents pursuant to sections 53 and 60 of the *Indian Act*, while approval of transactions remains with ISC.
2. A community enrolled in the RLEMP prepares First Nations to undertake responsibilities such as land use planning, environmental management, and compliance monitoring on behalf of the Minister of ISC. RLEMP also builds capacity by providing core training and university courses that allow individuals to qualify for the Professional Land Management Certification Program. Through RLEMP, First Nations may progress through three levels of administrative responsibility under the *Indian Act*, receiving funding commensurate for each level. However, the available training funds may be applied to any training the First Nation deems useful to that role.
3. Land Manager Training: Although the number of First Nations that have accessed lands manager training through ISC is known, it is difficult to know how many of those who have been trained remain actively in that role. Furthermore, First Nations are not required to employ a person with formal training or NALMA certification as their lands manager. Considering the wider range of lands authority that is conferred through the Framework Agreement, the skill set for a lands manager for a First Nation would differ from that of a First Nation operating under the *Indian Act* lands regime, depending on the requirements of the particular land authority.

**Figure 77: Number of First Nations under *Indian Act* Lands Regime and in Land Manager Training**



Source: ISC 2023

**Figure 78: Number of First Nations under the *Indian Act* and Framework Agreement**



Source: ISC 2023

\*\* Note: Due to the pandemic, Community votes have been delayed. An additional ten land codes are expected to be added, once pending adhesions to the Framework Agreement are signed.

## Indigenous-led Lands Institute

The *NIES Call to Economic Prosperity #79* has called for the establishment of “an Indigenous Institute to collect and govern Indigenous data about population, businesses, lands, and resources...[that] will monitor and measure implementation of these Calls to Economic Prosperity.” In June 2024, the First Nations University of Canada announced the launch of the National Indigenous Economic Prosperity Institute, created to respond to Call to Economic Prosperity #79.

In addition to environmental monitoring and assessment, an Indigenous-led Lands Institute would potentially encompass training and research into land management, land use planning, land survey, land registration, land and resource economics, etc. As with other Indigenous-led institutions, a Lands Institute would be a key element of economic reconciliation and function as a centre of excellence for the promotion of leading practices, case studies, tools, templates, and advice to build Indigenous capacity specific to land management.

The Indigenous Land Management Institute at the University of Saskatchewan, for example, “brings research, teaching, outreach and engagement activities in the area of Indigenous land and resource management together under one umbrella unit.” Also offered through the University of Saskatchewan is the *Kanawayihetaytan Askiy Certificate: “Let us Take Care of the Land”* that can be taken either as a one- or two-year certificate or a two- or three-year diploma program. The certificate can also lead into further training under the Professional Lands Management Certification Program, offered by NALMA. Diplomas are also offered in Indigenous Lands Governance and Indigenous Resource Management.

## Innovation in Yukon Land Titles Office

### Kwanlin Dün First Nation Using LTO to register Leasehold interests

Given that Section 89(1) of the *Indian Act* prohibits First Nation debtors from using commercial assets as collateral for commercial loans, the capital embedded in those assets remains unavailable to First Nation entities and individuals alike. In 2016, Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN) made a major step forward in amending its 2005 Settlement Agreement to allow the Yukon Land Titles system to be used, thus enabling leased lands to be used as collateral. This demonstrated that First Nations settlement lands can enjoy the same protections as other lands registered in the territorial Land Titles Office (LTO) without losing Aboriginal Title. Previously, First Nations land would be ineligible for mortgages and other forms of financing that are available to off-reserve borrowers; however, changes to the *Land Titles Act, 2015 (Yukon)* in 2017 allowed for registration, in the LTO, of interests such as leases and mortgages, in Category A and Category B settlement lands of self-governing First Nations. The change was driven by KDFN, who own 1,036 square kilometres of land in and around Whitehorse, making them the largest landowner in the city.

"These changes should make it easier for First Nations to build commercial or residential developments on their land. They can also lease the registered land to individuals, who can then apply for mortgages to build homes. Once a lease expires, the First Nation is free to de-register the land, leaving Aboriginal Title intact."<sup>181</sup>

The arrangement allows a headlease to be registered in the name of the Kwanlin Dün Development Corporation, and sub-leases to be registered from that land base against Certificates of Title to KDFN citizens and non-First Nation citizens alike. Being registered in an established land titles system, and because they are for terms of 15 years or more, the leases contain value that can be freely transferred and are registerable in the system. The new arrangement was used in 2017 to allow Air North to secure financing using their leasehold interest as collateral, enhancing their ability to further develop the business.

Terms of leases would include covenants that require the lessee to make responsible use of the property, e.g., in respect of environmental leading practices, including provision of a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment upon termination. As noted, should a First Nation wish, they are free to "de-register" the lands, removing the ability to access securities by registration in the LTO. Premier Darrell Pasloski: "No government has ever tried to do what the Yukon government and Kwanlin Dün are doing..." As Rod Snow, lawyer for KDFN added: in taking this step, the Yukon is simply finding its own way to provide an option that already exists in many parts of the country..."

## Additions to Reserve

Reserve creation has been governed by the Addition to Reserve/Reserve Creation Policy Directive, introduced in 2016, that sets out the issues to be addressed before land can become reserve land. Additions to Reserves (ATRs) are classified as either urban or rural and fall into three different policy categories: legal obligations, community additions, and new reserves. Since 2011, there have been 629 approved ATRs, of which 510 were rural and 115 were urban (Figure 79). Moreover, the majority of ATRs were legal obligations, representing 500 of the total ATRs (Figure 80), whereas 118 of the total ATRs were community additions and 11 new reserves.

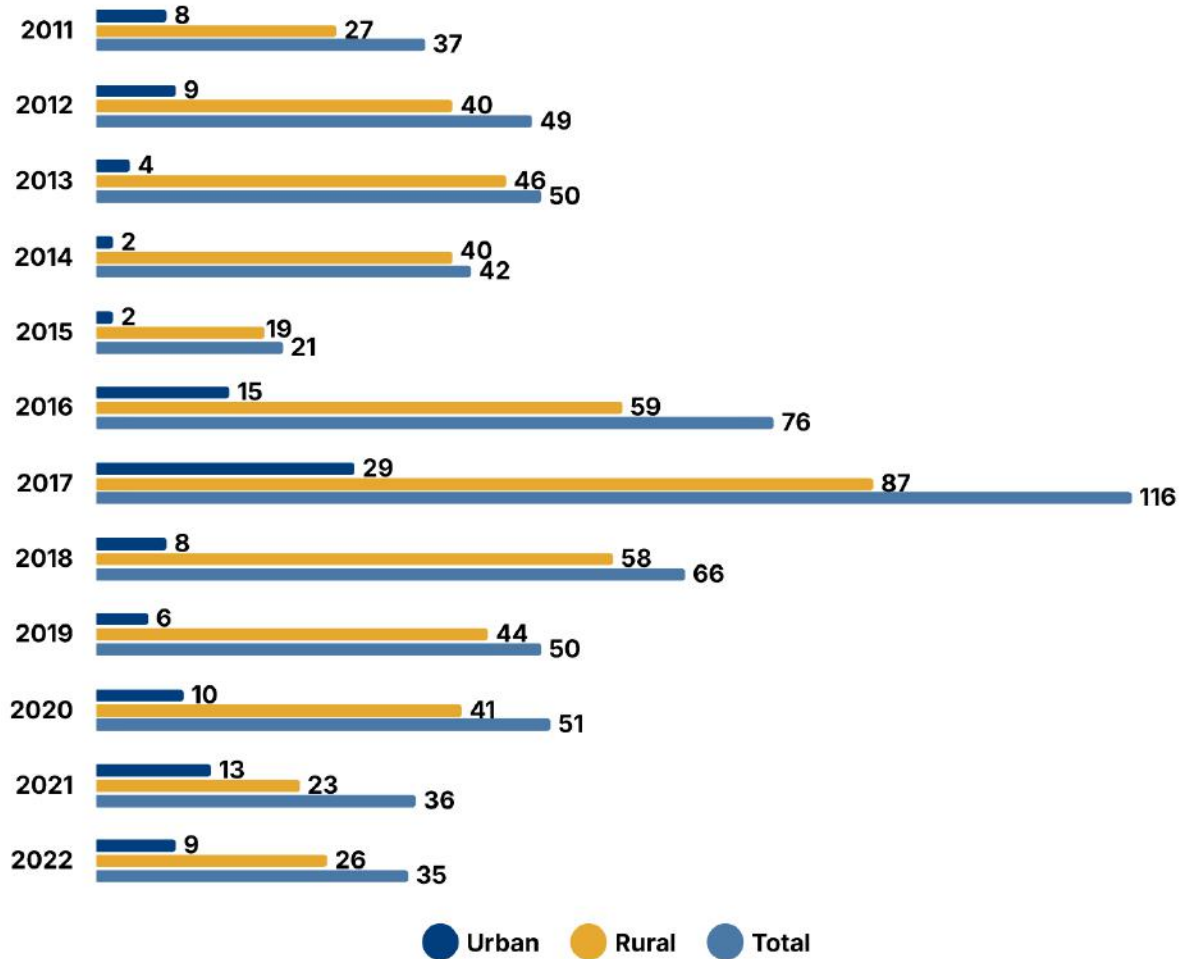
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<sup>181</sup> Yukon News. (2016, July 6). *New Legislation allows First Nations to register land without losing title.*



Figure 79: Number of Additions to Reserves, Urban vs Rural, 2011 to 2022

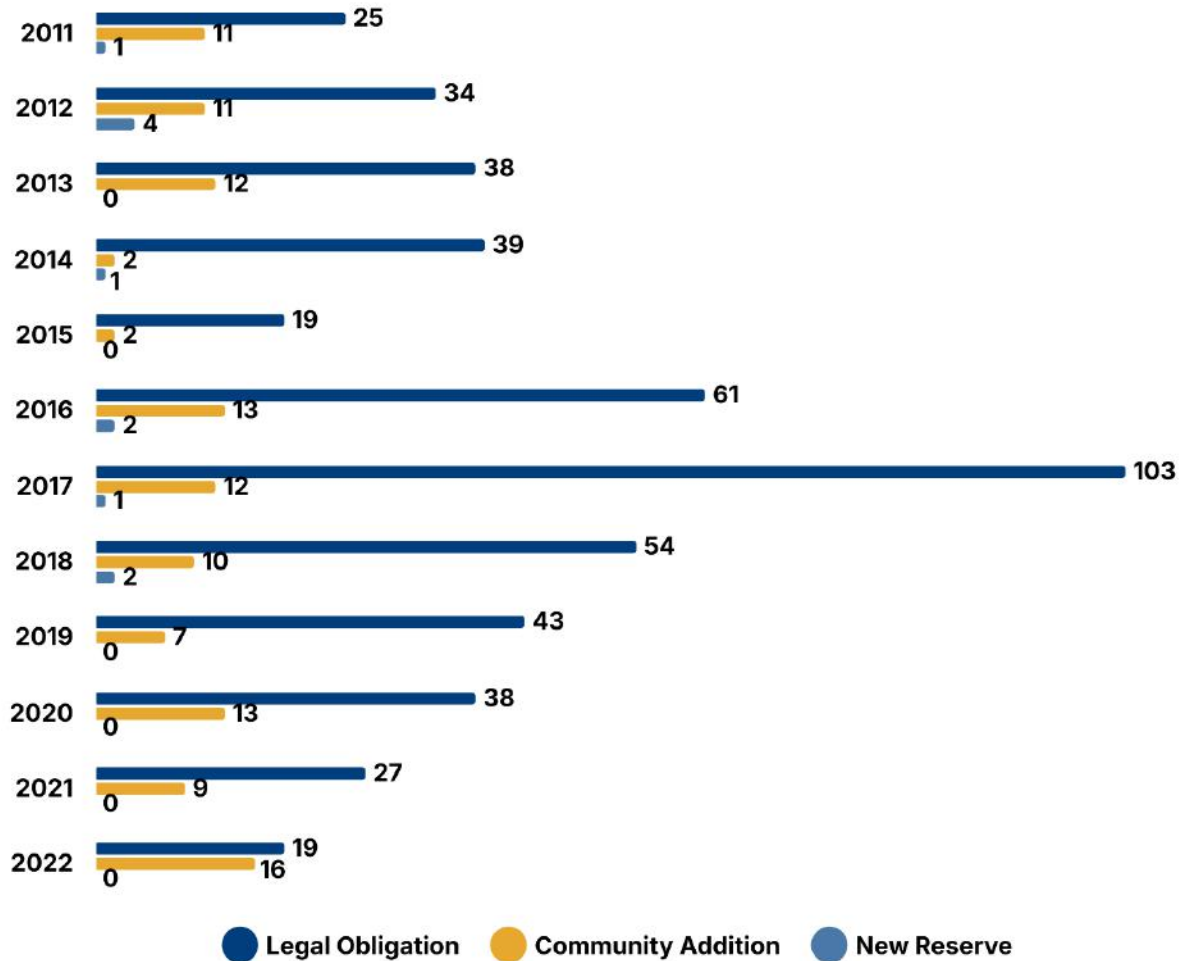
## Number of Additions to Reserves, Urban vs Rural, 2011 to 2022



Source: CIRNAC, 2022

Figure 80: Number of Additions to Reserve by Policy Category, 2011 to 2022

## Number of Additions to Reserve by Policy Category, 2011 to 2022



Source: CIRNAC, 2022

Currently, ISC is undertaking a re-design of the ATR Policy, under First Nations leadership, buoyed by \$10.8 million in Budget 2021 funding, and targeting spring 2025 to present policy options. This follows widespread criticism of the existing policies and approach as being inadequate and ineffective, resulting in a backlog of 1,300 applications, as reported in the 2019 *IEPR*. As previously identified by First Nations, the AFN, internal audits, and Parliamentary Committees, the following challenges persist in the ATR process:

- A lack of access to pre-reserve designation outside of the Prairie Provinces for treaty land and settlement agreements. Prairie Provinces have access to pre-reserve designations, meaning that they may have some assurances and potential use of the land that they have applied to own through the ATR process prior to the success of the application;
- Challenges with addressing existing third-party interests before reserve creation led to delays, uncertainty, frustration, and lost opportunities for First Nations and other stakeholders;

- Proposals to add urban reserves are often more complex, with additional features (e.g., municipal service agreements); and,
- Lack of core capacity in First Nations Communities, program management/tracking tools, resources for land surveys, and environmental studies.

The Yellowhead Institute echoed similar concerns in 2018 and called for CIRNAC to allocate additional resources towards reducing ATR processing times. They also called for the Crown to play a greater role in fostering greater inter-jurisdictional cooperation.<sup>182</sup>

In 2020, the OECD recommended the following actions to improve the effectiveness of the ATR process:

- Working with municipalities to shorten the length of time it takes to implement an ATR. The number of ATR requests and the length of time that they take to be resolved should be publicly reported;
- Offering more direct support for land acquisition, especially in areas where land is more valuable, such as urban areas or their vicinity;
- Strengthening the dispute resolution mechanisms to negotiate with third party interests, such as municipalities; and,
- Increasing funding and resources to support environmental assessments and surveys.<sup>183</sup>

The *NIES* has called for the establishment of an inventory of surplus federal lands, so that First Nations are able to evaluate available Crown lands. Other improvements would include offering Indigenous Peoples first right of refusal of available lands, respecting the Government of Canada's legal obligation under Treaty Land Entitlement. On a provincial basis, although some provinces provide an inventory of available provincial Crown land, much closer coordination between provincial, municipal, and federal governments is needed for ATR purposes.

According to the most recent internal data from ISC (Figure 81), there were 1,036 active ATR submissions representing one million acres (4,046.9 square km) of land to be added to reserve. There are an additional estimated 2.7 million acres (10,926.5 square km) through Treaty Entitlement and Specific Claims, for a total of 3.7 million acres (16,187.4 square km) of land that are proposed to be added or used to create new reserves. Eighty-eight percent (912) of the 1,036 ATR files represent a legal obligation for the Crown that must be addressed. Current applications involve 186 First Nations, with the majority (57%) of applications for ATR's coming from First Nations under *Indian Act* governance regimes, and not the FNLN Framework Agreement.

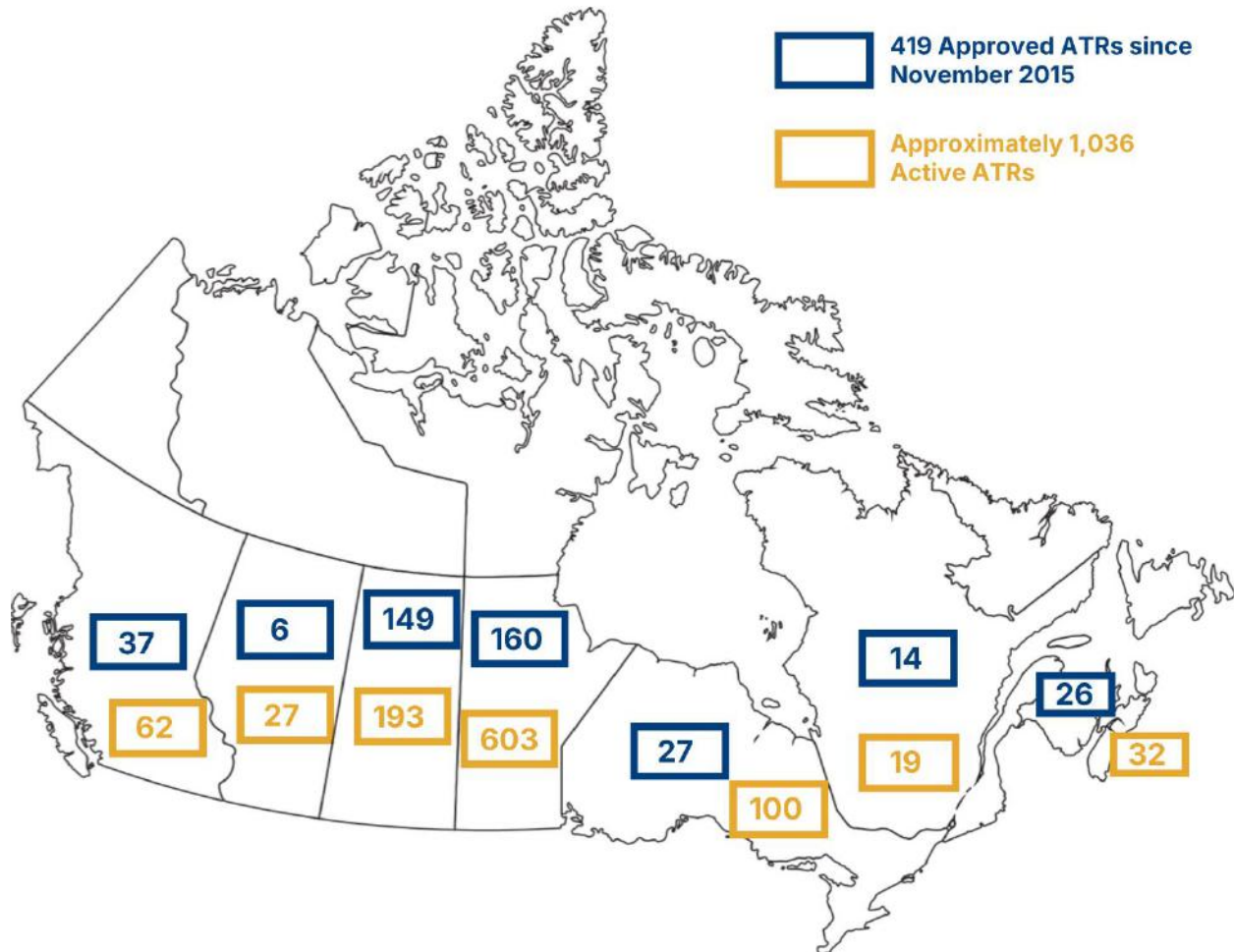
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<sup>182</sup> Iwama, D. (2018, August 14). *On the Road to the New Reserve: Considering Canada's Preferred Path to Land Restitution*. Yellowhead Institute.

<sup>183</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2020). *Linking Indigenous Communities with Regional Development in Canada*. OECD Publishing.

Figure 81: Regional Breakdown of Approved and Active ATRs in Canada’s Inventory, as of November 24, 2022

## Regional Breakdown of Approved and Active ATRs in Canada's Inventory, as of November 24, 2022



Source: CIRNAC 2022

### Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas and Indigenous Guardians

Indigenous Protected Areas and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and Indigenous Guardians are a promising policy pathway to realize Indigenous economies that reflect Indigenous values regarding land.

In 2017, the Indigenous Circle of Experts for The Pathway to Target 1 was established in Canada. They defined IPCAs as the “lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primarily role in protecting ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems.” According to this definition, IPCAs could also encompass a variety of land protection initiatives, including Tribal Parks, Indigenous Cultural Landscapes, Indigenous Protected Areas, and Indigenous conserved areas. The view was that the areas would be identified, managed, and conserved in partnership with Indigenous

governments, consistent with the principle of “Free Prior and Informed Consent” as expressed in the *UN Declaration*.

Indigenous governments are responsible for setting the conservation standards for IPCAs. As such, they must have full scope to design their IPCAs to meet their individual and diverse needs. While IPCAs embody a common goal of conserving the ecological and cultural values important to Indigenous Peoples, the priorities and objectives of individual IPCAs may vary greatly. However, they do share some commonalities. They must be:

- Indigenous led;
- represent a long-term commitment to conservation while considering Indigenous Rights and responsibilities;
- promote respect for Indigenous knowledge systems;
- respect protocols and ceremony;
- support the revitalization of Indigenous languages;
- utilize seed conservation economies, if possible;
- conserve cultural keystone species and protect food security; and,
- adopt integrated, holistic approaches to governance and planning.

This approach is a significant change in perspective from the colonial approach to protected areas, where “parks” and “protected areas” were for recreational enjoyment. In that approach, the Indigenous connection and title to the land was an obstacle, resulting in scenarios where communities were forced to relocate or were restricted access by imposed jurisdictions, effectively eliminating the Indigenous practices and economies from the area.<sup>184</sup>

### Global Impact for Conservation

The opportunities for Indigenous-led conservation are significant globally. The World Database on Protected areas estimated in 2018 that Indigenous Peoples are managing more than 38 million km<sup>2</sup> of land located in 87 different countries.<sup>185</sup> This represents more than 25% of the world's land mass and intersects with approximately 40% of all intact landscapes and terrestrial protected areas. Approximately 20% of the Indigenous lands are within protected areas, and these Indigenous lands represent a higher proportion of protected land than other protected land types. Also, 67% of Indigenous lands are classified as natural landscapes, compared with 44% of other lands. With a large overlap of Indigenous and protected lands worldwide, Indigenous Peoples can play an essential role in meeting global conservation goals.<sup>186</sup>

Although Canada has had ambitious goals for conservation, the country is significantly lagging behind Australia and Brazil in terms of the percentage of Indigenous-led protected land relative to the total land

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<sup>184</sup> Indigenous Circle of Experts. (2018). *We rise together : achieving pathway to Canada target 1 through the creation of Indigenous protected and conserved areas in the spirit and practice of reconciliation : the Indigenous Circle of Experts' report and recommendations*.

<sup>185</sup> Protected Planet. (2024). *Discover the world's protected and conserved areas*.

<sup>186</sup> Garnett, S. T. (2018). A spatial overview of the global importance of Indigenous lands for conservation. *Nature Sustainability*, 1, 369-374.

area protected. Brazil has reported 42.82% and Australia has reported 47.23%, while Canada has reported less than 0.48% and the United States has reported 0.03%.

### Economic Impacts

There is also a strong economic argument for IPCAs. In 2016, a study conducted about the Łutsël K'édene and Dehcho Guardian program in the Northwest Territories found the initial investment of \$4.5 million generated approximately \$11.1 million in social, economic, cultural, and environmental value. This was a 2.5 return, which was expected to grow over time and did not take into account the additional impact on the well-being of the Indigenous people, communities, and governments involved.

The model of IPCA has proven to be successful in Australia. In 2021, there were 75 Indigenous protected areas covering over sixty-seven million hectares of land and sea. This made up almost 45 percent of the national parks system of parks which came together through partnerships between Indigenous landowners and the government.<sup>187</sup> This model has also proven to be economically beneficial as well. A study of this system in 2016 showed that for every \$1 invested, they delivered \$2.50 in economic, cultural, and environmental benefits, mostly in opportunities for the Indigenous stewards or guardians of the land.<sup>188</sup> The Australia experience indicates that benefits extend even beyond expected revenue and job creation. They found that IPCAs reduced pressure on the judicial, social service, and health care systems in the region, as well as reduced welfare costs and increased tax revenue with IPCA and Guardian initiatives.

Finally, British Columbia has some of the oldest and most well-established Indigenous Guardians programs and they too have had a significant impact on the economic picture of the communities they are in. A 2016 report found:

*“Investments in Coastal Guardian Watchmen programs generate significant value for their Nations and communities. When net value generation is calculated across affected Nation-held values [Taking Care of Territory, Governance Good for the land, good for the people, good for the economy | 18 IPCAs and Indigenous Guardians Authority, Community Wellbeing, Cultural Wellbeing, Community Capacity, Economic Opportunity], Coastal Guardian Watchmen programs achieve, at the low end, a 10 to 1 annual return on investment for the Nations that have the programs. In other words, for each dollar invested in a Guardian Watchmen program on an annual basis, the respective First Nation benefits at least 10 times that amount. On the high end, some Nations experience a 20 to 1 return on investment each year.”<sup>189</sup>*

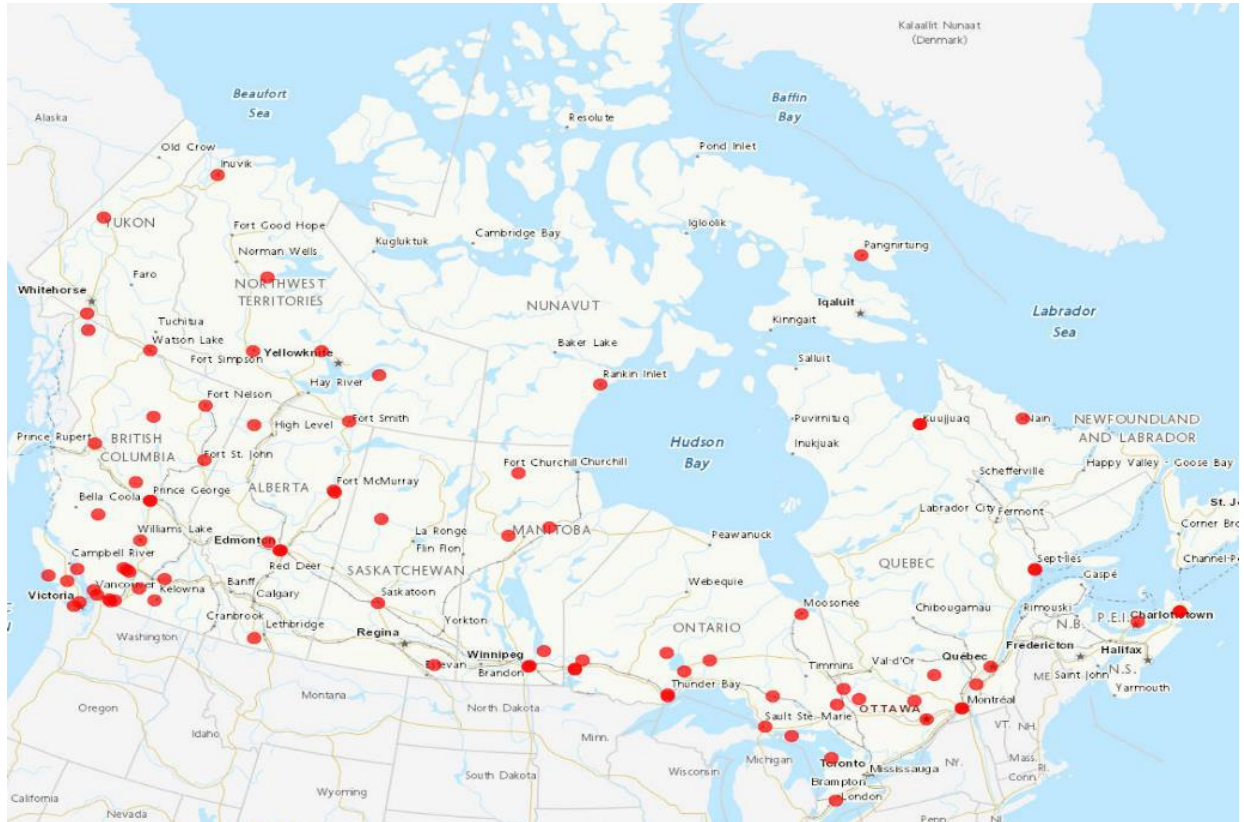
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<sup>187</sup> National Indigenous Australian Agency. (2016). *Consolidated report on Indigenous Protected Areas following Social Return on Investment analysis*.

<sup>188</sup> Indigenous Leadership Initiative. (N/A). *Indigenous-Led Conservation from Australia to Canada*.

<sup>189</sup> EcoPlan International Inc. (2016). *Valuing Coastal Watchmen Programs: A Business Case*. Coastal Steward Network & TNC Canada.

**Figure 82: Indigenous Guardian Initiatives Funding Map, Year 5, 2023**



Source: Government of Canada. (2023). *Indigenous Guardians Map*.

This demonstrates that stewardship over the land provides economic opportunities beyond what the conventional monetary economies create. Community members are employed to steward their traditional territories, becoming guides for tourists and sharing their knowledge and experiences within their unique regions (Figure 82).

As for the land portion of the initiative, the approach is still nascent. Since 2018, three IPCAs have been announced in Canada:

1. Ts'udé Niljné Tueyata (Ramparts River and Wetlands) is a sacred site for the K'asho Got'jñę people in Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories. This site covers 10,000 square kilometres of land.
2. Edézhíe protected area is the first IPCAs in Canada, covering 14,218 square kilometres of land. This site is a spiritual place that is ecologically and physically unique and its lands, waters, and wildlife are important to the Dehcho Dene Culture.
3. Thaidene Nënë is an IPCAs designated by the Łutsël K'é Dene First Nation using their Dene Law in 2019. The area spans 26,376 square kilometres of land and is the homelands of Łutsël K'é Dene where their ancestors laid down the sacred, ethical, and practical foundations of the Dēnesųłñę way of life.

In addition, other protected lands have been declared by several First Nations under their own sovereign laws by Indigenous communities. These include the Rausch Valley, the Meares Island Tribal Park, the Hada

and Kakweikan protected area, and the Seal River Watershed.<sup>190</sup> At the time of writing, there were fifty-two Indigenous communities who had either received funding to either establish IPCAs or were involved in planning and engagement work to develop new conservation areas.<sup>191</sup>

A recent report entitled *Indigenous protected and conserved areas (IPCAs): Canada's new path forward for biological and cultural conservation and Indigenous well-being* provides recommendations for the preservation of land and associated economic development opportunities and specifically calls:

For IPCAs or other protected areas, such as Tribal Parks, already declared by BC First Nations, we call on BC and where appropriate, Canada, to formally respond to and immediately begin working with these Nations to align Crown tenures and decision-making with the Indigenous designation, including deployment of effective interim protection measures, and sufficient resourcing for negotiations regarding long-term Crown legal recognition of the IPCA and Indigenous management of the area.

## Conclusion

Access to land and freedom to manage it are extremely important for Indigenous Peoples to receive maximum benefits from economic development opportunities. With the repeal of the *FNLMA*, explicit alignment with the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management signals a distinct Indigenous voice and intention in the implementation of sectoral governance in the lands sector.

Since the 2019 *IEPR*, there has only been one self-government agreement signed and no Comprehensive Land Claims agreed to, but there have been recent developments with the recognition of rights and protection of Indigenous lands. Through the RIRSD Tables and IPCAs and Indigenous guardians, progress is evident. Currently, there have been eighteen agreements signed through the RIRSD process and more than 80 Indigenous guardian initiatives in place.

The Indigenous land base is growing through land claim settlements and additions to reserve; however, these processes are not always intuitive. It is imperative that Indigenous Peoples are given control of their land base to maximize economic opportunities such as mining development, agriculture, and commercial and residential development. A positive correlation between greater control over lands and resources and higher socio-economic outcomes was one of the most important findings of the 2012 *Aboriginal Economic Benchmarking Report*.

The ATR Program remains a lengthy and cumbersome process. In addition, the fact that this program is managed at the federal government level represents an inherent conflict of interest. In light of this, the NIEDB recommends that a First Nations led alternative be implemented that is focused on reconciliation and support for First Nations' vision for a stronger land base. A national legal framework with consistent design and monitoring and reporting mechanisms would facilitate the process and help alleviate the

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<sup>190</sup> Rutgers, J.-S. (2024, January 18). *'We're writing our own story': four Manitoba First Nations sign historic conservation agreement*. The Narwhal.

<sup>191</sup> Environment and Climate Change Canada. (2021, August 12). *Government of Canada announces \$340 million to support Indigenous-led conservation*. Government of Canada.



backlog of applications.

2019 IEPR Lands Recommendations

- ***Increase resources to the ATR program to expedite applications.***

2024 IEPR Lands Recommendations

- ***Continue to work towards a First Nations-led alternative for the Additions to Reserve program, focused on reconciliation and support for First Nations' visions for a stronger land base.***
- ***Develop legal framework in Canada that explicitly recognizes Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) as a form of protected area and ensure its alignment with Indigenous values towards land, conservation, and stewardship, while also highlighting the economic benefits of land stewardship, including job creation and promotion of sustainable economic practices.***
- ***Support and expand the First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA) initiative to increase First Nations' control over their land management functions.***
- ***Increase resources for training and capacity building for Indigenous land-managers to ensure effective and autonomous land management.***

## UNDERLYING INDICATOR #5: INFRASTRUCTURE

*“Closing the infrastructure gap is about more than short-term remedies; it’s about fulfilling the promise of reconciliation through lasting solutions that ensure the safety and well-being of our community. It is about rectifying the historical injustices that have left Indigenous communities at a severe disadvantage.”*

– Chief Donna Big Canoe from the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation (The Star, 2023).

### Infrastructure Highlights

Infrastructure is an important component for the development of well-functioning societies, and essential for economic prosperity, as well as overall welfare and are categorized in this chapter by education; energy; health; housing; telecommunications; transportation; water; and wastewater. A recent report by the Assembly of First Nations in 2024 found the infrastructure gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations to be at \$349.2 billion.

#### Housing

- Inuit households continue to experience the most unsuitable housing conditions compared to other Indigenous groups as the percentage of dwellings in need of major repairs remained unchanged since the last Census – 26.2% of dwellings in need of major repairs. Inuit households also continue to experience the worst overcrowding conditions compared to other Indigenous groups as they scored the worst on all housing suitability indicators - 20.7% of households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 10% with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 9.4% with a three-bedroom shortfall.
- Métis experience the best outcomes in housing compared to the other Indigenous groups in terms of housing suitability and overcrowding.
- An additional 2,190 housing projects have been added bringing the total to 3,766, which has resulted in 4,763 new homes in First Nations Communities.

 **4,763**  
new homes in  
First Nations  
communities  
since 2019

#### Water

 **139**  
drinking  
water  
advisories  
since 2015

- The amount of long-term drinking water advisories is now considerably less as 139 were lifted since November 2015, leaving 31 long-term drinking water advisories in effect.
- The target set out in the 2012 benchmarking report, and the commitment from the Federal Government to lift all water advisories in Indigenous communities has not been met.

#### Education

- First Nations education-related infrastructure projects increased by 99 projects since 2019, with an additional 117 projects completed. Projects towards new school constructions resulted in 67 new schools.
- Educational infrastructure for the Métis is almost non-existent in major metropolitan areas which reflects jurisdictional challenges that has resulted in a history of underfunding for the Métis.
- The Inuit within Nunavut are facing significant gaps with respect to access to regulated childcare facilities and post-secondary facilities, which has resulted in a high share of the population without a high-school diploma and a low share with a bachelor's degree.

 **117**  
First Nation  
education  
projects  
completed  
since 2019

#### Energy

 **86**  
energy  
projects  
completed  
since 2019

- 178 remote and northern Indigenous communities are not connected to the North American energy grid and natural gas infrastructure. All 25 communities within Nunavut rely on diesel energy and there is no regional energy grid across the territory.
- An additional 86 energy projects have been completed since 2019 contributing to a total of 125 completed energy projects.
- The proportion of Indigenous involvement within the ownership of renewable energy projects has increased by a substantial amount since 2010.

#### Health

- The total health-related infrastructure projects increased by 50 since the 2019 IEPR, now at a total of 257.
- Most of the increase in health-related infrastructure projects went into health facilities, an additional of 32 now bringing the total to 79, resulting in 205 health-related infrastructure projects completed since 2016.

 **205**  
health-related  
infrastructure  
completed  
since 2016

## Introduction

Infrastructure is an important component for the development of well-functioning societies and essential for economic prosperity, as well as overall welfare.

In this chapter, an overview of the current infrastructure situation amongst the Indigenous population will be reviewed based on seven basic infrastructure categories: education, energy, health, housing, telecommunications, transportation, water, and wastewater. This is achieved by looking at investments into Indigenous infrastructure projects, availability of infrastructure and infrastructure services, and quality of infrastructure where possible. The majority of the data reviewed within this chapter has been obtained through ISC and the Canadian Census. Due to the lack of readily available data, the majority of the data will focus on First Nations. To mitigate this, a series of reports will be used to highlight the reality for Inuit and Métis. Due to the difference in data collection for this chapter, the reader may be mindful of dates and cohort type (individual, household or community).

Infrastructure needs, particularly in the North, have been identified as one of several barriers to economic development faced by Indigenous communities<sup>192</sup> due to lack of basic infrastructure, such as water and wastewater systems, housing, telecommunications, transportation, and reliable energy.<sup>193</sup>

### What is Infrastructure?

Infrastructure is a broad term that originated from the French by which *infra* means “below” or “beneath” and *structure* means an “arrangement of parts” or in its broadest sense, meaning “anything put together.”<sup>194</sup> Moreover, infrastructure is usually thought to mean the underlying structure of a country, intended to support the well-being of the population and the efficient functioning of its economy. In the Cambridge dictionary, infrastructure is defined as the basic system and services, such as transportation and power supplies, that a country or organization uses in order to work effectively.<sup>195</sup>

Most authors adopting a definition of infrastructure typically classify it into two categories, as either physical and social, and can go so far as to subcategorize it as economic, social, or hard, and soft infrastructure. Physical infrastructure usually is meant to include structures such as roads, bridges, powerlines, water systems, and so on, whereas social infrastructure is usually meant to include infrastructures supporting social, political, and cultural services supporting a community or nation, such as schools, hospitals, and community centers. Additionally, many authors identify infrastructure by analyzing its functions and characteristics.<sup>196</sup> Generally, infrastructure has been described as intermediate capital resources that serve critical foundations for productive behavior within economic and social systems, usually in combination with other inputs to provide services. Infrastructure can also be viewed as networks, which involve delivery systems and allow substantial interaction in the provision of services to individual customers.<sup>197</sup> Infrastructure is also often described as being associated with high-up fronts

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<sup>192</sup> Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. (2022).

<sup>193</sup> Centre for the North at the Conference Board of Canada (2014).

<sup>194</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary. (2017, September 28). *Infrastructure*.

<sup>195</sup> Cambridge Dictionary. (N/A). *Infrastructure*.

<sup>196</sup> Addie, J-P. D. (2017, March 6). Infrastructure. In D Richardson et al. (Eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, The Earth, Environment, and Technology*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.; Cantu, C. (2017). Defining Infrastructure and its Effect on Economic Growth. *Equilibrio Economico, Revista de Economia, Política y Sociedad*, 13(1), 77-104.

<sup>197</sup> Cantu, C. (2017). Defining Infrastructure and its Effect on Economic Growth. *Equilibrio Economico, Revista de Economia, Política y Sociedad*, 13(1), 77-104.

costs with low (or even zero) marginal costs, which makes infrastructure highly susceptible to financing issues and sunk costs. In addition, infrastructure has also been described as an impure public good (meaning either non-excludable or non-rival in consumption or somewhere in-between depending on the context), which makes infrastructure susceptible to market failures.<sup>198</sup> Infrastructure can usually be associated with significant positive externalities. Infrastructure is also often associated with government intervention because of market failures and externalities. Education is a great example of a positive externality which demands significant government support.

In this chapter, infrastructure is considered from a community perspective and infrastructures that are commonly referenced within Indigenous contexts will be discussed. This is not meant to be a complete classification or taxonomy, as what constitutes infrastructure can be complex and wide-reaching.

### Context to Indigenous Infrastructure

According to a 2016 report by the Canadian Council for Public Private Partnerships, the infrastructure gap has been capped at \$25-30 billion for First Nations. However, a most a recent report by the AFN in 2024 found the infrastructure gap to be at \$349.2 billion. This large infrastructure gap is a result of many complex wide-ranging factors such as legislative and policy, financing, capacity, jurisdiction, scale, and timelines that have impacted Indigenous communities over time.

### Legislative and Policy

One of the main factors impacting the infrastructure gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians is the result of the colonial legislative and policy agenda that has placed First Nations in a regulatory environment undermining efficient and sustainable infrastructure development using the *Indian Act*. Sections of the *Indian Act* have laid out the foundation to govern First Nations infrastructure, affecting their ability to plan, design, construct, and maintain infrastructure on their own land. Funds for infrastructure come from many different branches of the federal government, based on policy direction and focused timeframes. This regulatory environment creates a system where Indigenous governments have only nominal control while undermining the capacity of Indigenous government to exercise control over their communities. Given that the federal government controls infrastructure on Indigenous lands, they have failed to provide sufficient resources to support the development of infrastructure assets, which has led to First Nations lacking key revenue options for the development of comparable infrastructure assets to those found in other jurisdictions.

## Indigenous Agency in Infrastructure

Despite the large infrastructure gap, many Indigenous communities have shown great resilience and progress in providing an adequate infrastructure base for their communities. Below are some community infrastructure success stories identified by the public policy forum.<sup>199</sup>

- Tsawwassen First Nation in British Columbia developed their own \$27 million sewage treatment plant that was key to unlocking more than \$2.5 billion of economic development on their lands. The community was not able to access funds through the First Nations Finance authority or existing common municipal financing options. They overcame this barrier by securing

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<sup>198</sup> Frischmann, B. M. (2012, May 24). *Infrastructure: The Social Value of Shared Resources*. Oxford Academic.

<sup>199</sup> Baird, K. & Podlasly, M. (2020, September 3). *The Opportunity for Indigenous Infrastructure*. Public Policy Forum.

conventional bank loans, which are to be repaid through lease revenue, taxes, and development cost charges.

- ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation in British Columbia was the first Nation to implement a service tax under the *First Nations Fiscal Management Act* to cover the costs for the community's water system infrastructure on a leased section of their land called Indian Beach Estates. The water system was in need of significant repairs and maintenance. The service tax allowed for the existing water distribution infrastructure at Indian Beach Estates to be replaced with a new water distribution infrastructure that cost \$2 million.
- Kiashake Zaaging Anishinaabek/Gull Bay First Nation in Ontario developed a solar energy generation and storage micro grid. This is Canada's first fully integrated microgrid, which uses a combination of battery storage and solar panels as a clean energy substitute for costly diesel generation. The microgrid provides a source of clean energy to 97 on-reserve houses, which reduces the community's annual diesel consumption by 25%. The project was made possible by grievance settlement related to dams constructed on Northwestern Ontario's Nipigon River between 1918 and 1950 and through a partnership between the community, Ontario Power Generation, and the independent electricity operator.

## Infrastructure Index

Recognizing the need for a thorough and rigorous assessment of the status of existing Infrastructure resources in Indigenous communities, in 2018, the National Indigenous Economic Development Board requisitioned an in-depth study in this area from the Centre for the Study of Living Standards. The Infrastructure Index Report for Remote Indigenous Communities produced a compilation index which examined several infrastructure indicators to produce a value with which to compare communities from different identity groups across different indicators.

Infrastructure Index figures were cited in the 2019 report and will be reiterated below, however several limitations were noted. For example, the index only reported on remote communities and did not have applicable data across the distinctions. The availability of certain data across indicators was also an inhibiting factor. In order to increase the applicability of the Index and to provide a more comprehensive picture of the state of infrastructure across Indigenous communities, the NIEDB is currently working to develop a more effective method across a refined set of indicators.

## Education

Education is very important, both at the individual and national level, as it helps people better care for themselves, their families, and communities, and leads to greater opportunities for employment. An educated workforce is essential for economic growth and development, contributing to productivity and innovation. In this section, infrastructure in Indigenous communities that support education will be reviewed, including the state of educational infrastructure throughout Canada amongst the Indigenous population by looking at First Nations, Inuit, and Métis separately. The reader must take into account that data across the Indigenous identity groups stems from different datasets and reports. Each report may not be comparable due differences in approaches, definitions, and timing. Moreover, each group faces different experiences and institutional arrangements that affect access to and quality of education.

According to a First Nations education fact sheet developed by the AFN in 2021, there existed a total of 450 school buildings present across First Nations Communities in Canada. Of this total, 402 were band operated, 24 were self-governing, two were private, seven were federal, and 15 were provincial schools. In addition, there were over 543 First Nation-operated elementary and secondary school programs. Consequently, this represents that, out of the 634 First Nations Communities, only 84% had access to elementary and/or secondary school programming in their community leaving an estimated more than 14,000 First Nation students without access to education programming in their communities. Moreover, amongst those communities that had elementary and/or secondary schools on reserve, less than half had access to high-school programming. This means that an estimated 54% of First Nation students were forced to leave home to achieve a high-school diploma.

The same fact sheet outlines an overview of First Nations education transformation. In 2019, the federal government, in co-development with the AFN, underwent a transformation of First Nations education and “replaced its outdated, inefficient, and inadequate proposal-based education programs with regional education approaches and funding models that provide more sufficient, predictable, and sustainable core funding.” As a result, Regional Education Agreements (REAs) were developed to “ensure education funding is comparable to provincial systems across the country while working towards additional funding agreements based on need to better account for factors such as remoteness, school size, language, and socio-economic conditions.”<sup>200</sup> These REAs enable First Nations to develop their own educational systems and agreements that more accurately reflect their own vision for First Nation control over education. In 2023, the fact sheet reported that 10 REAs were signed and concluded, with many others already underway (50 First Nations are currently engaged in the process to develop and REA).

In 2019, in support of developing new and improving First Nations education infrastructure, ISC reported a total of 174 education-related infrastructure projects, 51 of those completed with the remainder considered ongoing.<sup>201</sup> From the total, 73 projects were new school constructions, 85 were renovations and/or upgrades, seven were feasibility studies, and nine were supporting projects. For the 73 new schools being constructed, 121 communities were expected to benefit.

As of December 31, 2022, education-related infrastructure projects increased to 273, with 168 projects completed, and a total of \$1.73 billion invested (Figure 83). Of 77 new construction projects, 67 have resulted in new schools and of a total of 151 renovation and upgrade projects, 137 have been directed towards existing schools.

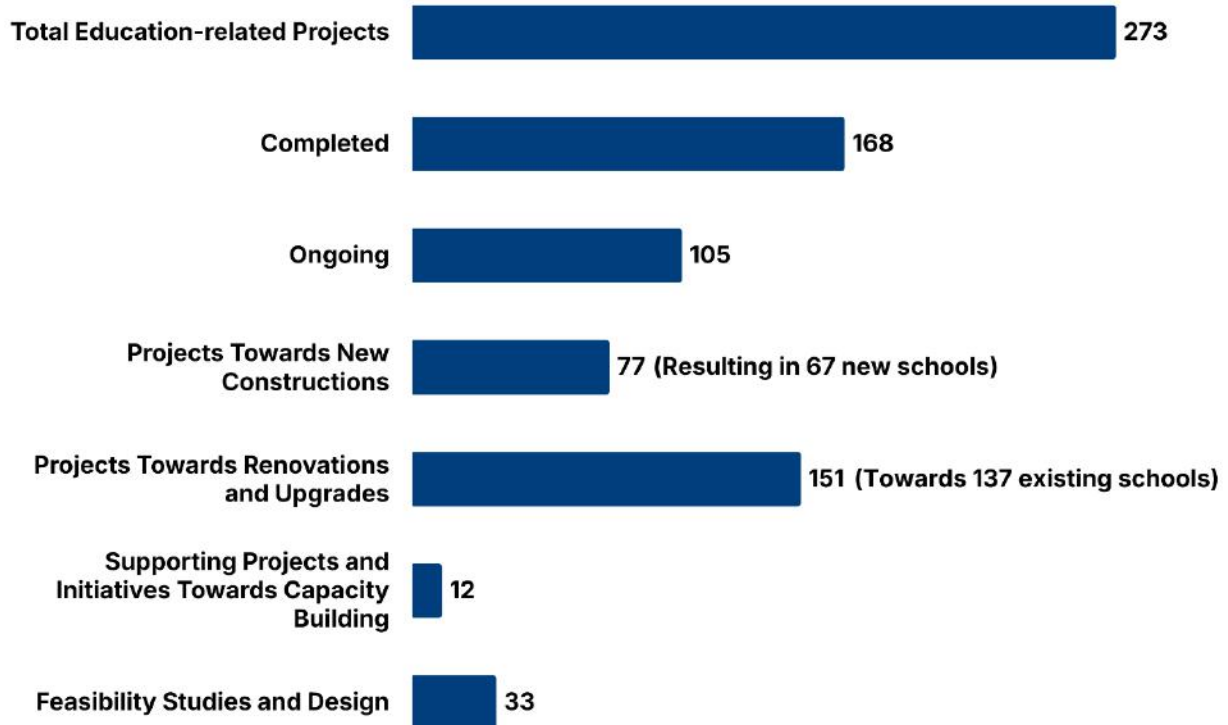
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<sup>200</sup> Assembly of First Nations. (2023). *K-12 Fact Sheet*.

<sup>201</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019). *Indigenous Economic Progress Report*.

Figure 83: Indigenous Services Canada’s Targeted Infrastructure Investments into School Facilities

## Indigenous Services Canada's Targeted Infrastructure Investments into School Facilities



Source: Indigenous Services Canada (2023)

For Inuit, in the report *Nunavut’s Infrastructure Gap*<sup>202</sup> analyzed the educational infrastructure gap based on four indicators: number of school-aged people per public school, licensed childcare facilities, universities and colleges, and high school graduation and postsecondary attainment rates. Below summarizes key findings from the report, determining areas where Nunavut faces gaps in its education system:

- Nunavut outperforms the other provinces in terms of school access per student but falls behind compared to Yukon and Northwest Territories.
- Nunavut faces the most significant shortages of childcare spaces in Canada. Specifically, 18% of children aged 0-5 and 11% of children aged 0-12 have access to regulated childcare facilities.
- Inuit in Nunavut have very few options for post-secondary education and most have to leave their communities or Nunavut altogether to achieve a post-secondary education. Specifically, there was a total of 25 community college campuses/learning locations all offered through Nunavut Arctic College.

<sup>202</sup> Nunavut Tunngavik. (2020). *Nunavut’s Infrastructure Gap*.

- Nunavut has the highest share of working age population without a high-school diploma and lowest share of working age population with a bachelor’s degree, at 42% and 15%, respectively.

For Métis, analyzing an educational infrastructure base is more complex. Outside of the Metis settlements located in Alberta, there is no officially recognized Métis community with a well-defined land base as many Metis are scattered across the country in small towns and cities. In areas where Métis reside (even in large metropolitan areas), outside of the already existing educational infrastructure, Métis-specific educational infrastructure is lacking. According to a recent report by the MNC<sup>203</sup>, “education infrastructure is almost non-existent in the major metropolitan areas within the homelands of the Métis, which has been a result of the jurisdictional challenges leading to a history of underfunding within Métis educational institutions – often channeling Métis students to pan-Indigenous structures.” To deal with this lagging educational infrastructure, the MNC has recommended that the Government of Canada fund \$1.17 billion over the next 10 years for a dedicated Métis K-12 education program. Additionally, in the Metis settlements located in Alberta, there are eight schools that serve Metis students from all settlements, with only one of those schools being located outside those boundaries.<sup>204</sup>

- First Nations Education-related infrastructure projects increased by 99 since 2019, with an additional 117 projects completed. Projects focused on new school constructions resulted in 67 new schools.
- The Inuit within Nunavut are facing significant gaps across access to regulated childcare facilities and post-secondary facilities, lagging behind most of the provinces, which has resulted in a high share of the population without a high-school diploma and a low share with a bachelor’s degree.
- Educational infrastructure for the Métis is almost non-existent in major metropolitan areas which reflects jurisdictional challenges that has resulted in a history of underfunding for the Métis.

## Energy

Energy is an essential input for the production of all goods and services in any economy. Inadequate energy infrastructure can hinder productivity and limit market growth opportunities. A reliable and safe supply of energy to households is also essential for the daily functioning of households, businesses, and schools. Lack of access to safe and reliable energy such as electrical power leads to the sub-optimal usage of alternative forms of energy such as diesel fuel, which in turn raises the cost of living and poses risks to health, the environment, and climate change. This section provides an overview of how Indigenous communities and households receive power and to what extent Indigenous Peoples are engaged in ownership of energy projects.

<sup>203</sup> Métis National Council. (2023). *Building Capacity for our Citizens*.

<sup>204</sup> Education Alberta. (N/A). *Métis Settlement Schools in Alberta*.



### Main Power Sources

There are approximately 178 remote Indigenous and Northern communities that are not connected to either an electricity grid or natural gas infrastructure.<sup>205</sup> These communities rely exclusively on diesel for electricity generation to heat homes, businesses, and public buildings. Diesel fuel provides a reliable source of heat and power in extreme climates that can be transported by ship and stored for long periods of time. However, diesel fuel can be more expensive than other forms of electricity generation, can pose potential health and environmental risks, and can leave communities vulnerable by relying on a single power source.

Out of those northern and remote communities that are not connected to either an electricity grid or natural gas infrastructure, 140 are Indigenous, with a majority of those communities First Nation (Figure 84). Specific to Nunavut, nearly all power is delivered from 25 diesel plants in 25 communities.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, Nunavut has no regional grid connecting across the territory. This is in stark contrast to the rest of Canada, where 60 percent of power is generated from hydroelectricity.

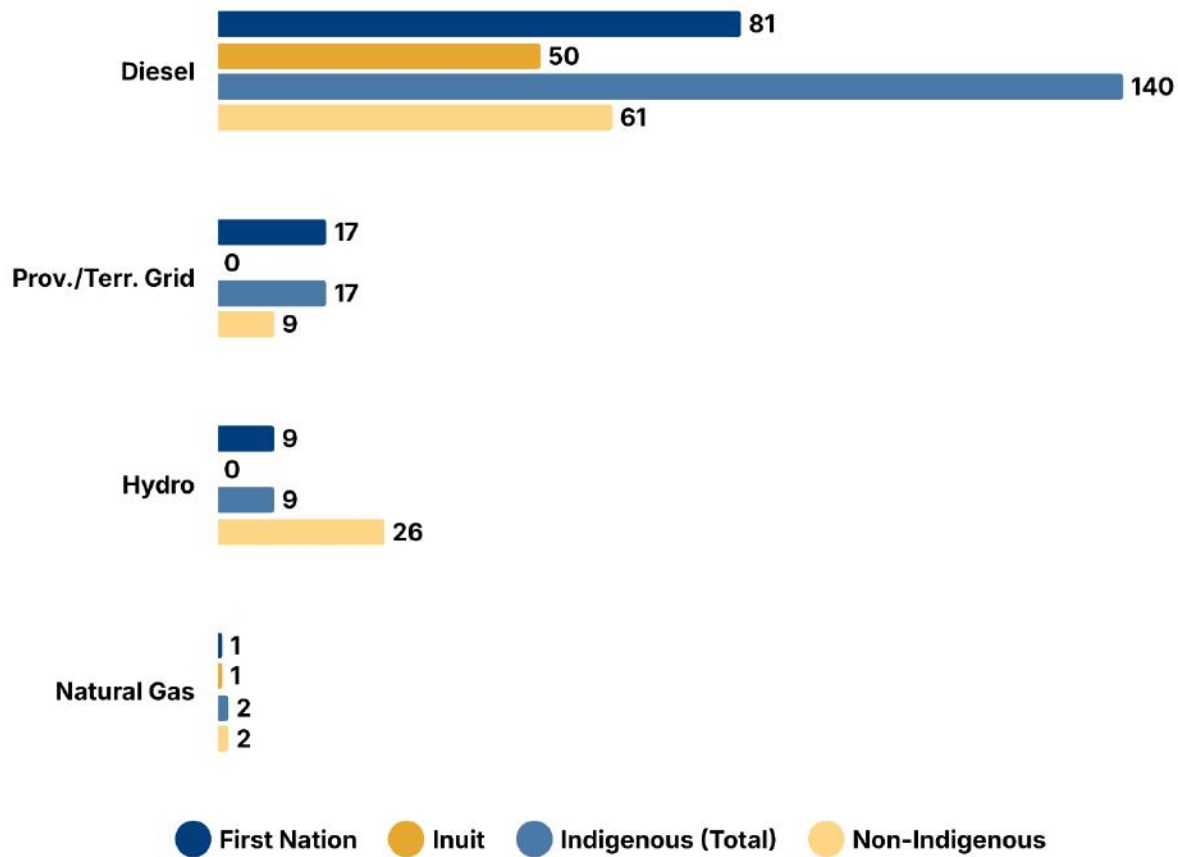
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<sup>205</sup> Canada Energy Regulator. (2023, February 15). *Market Snapshot: Clean Energy Projects in Remote Indigenous and Northern Communities*.

<sup>206</sup> Nunavut Tunngavik. (2020). *Nunavut's Infrastructure Gap*.

Figure 84: Number of Remote Communities by Main Power Source and Identity Group

## Number of Remote Communities by Main Power Source and Identity Group



Source: Canada Energy Regulator. (2023, February 15). *Market Snapshot: Clean Energy Projects in Remote Indigenous and Northern Communities*.

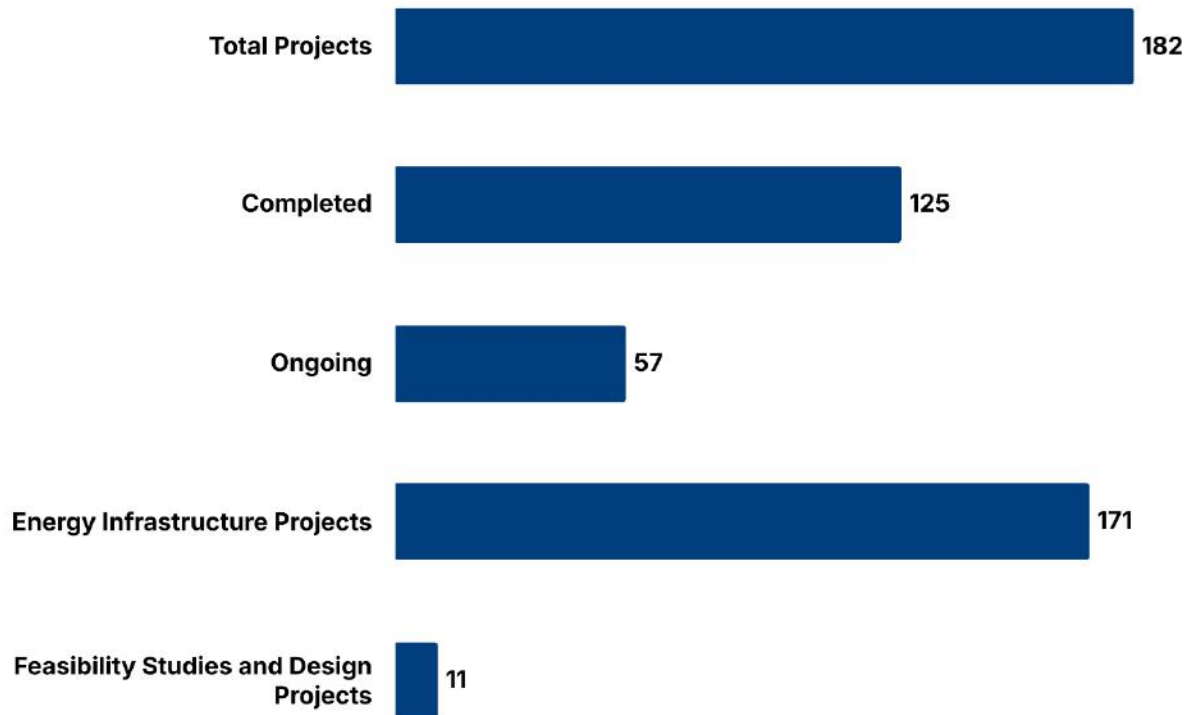
### Energy Projects

Many remote Indigenous communities across Canada are partnering with ISC to work towards reducing or eliminating reliance on diesel fuel and to transition to clean, reliable, and affordable energy systems. In 2019, there were a total of 68 projects benefitting 76 communities, with 39 completed and 29 ongoing.<sup>207</sup> As of December 31, 2022, \$302.5 million has been invested into a total of 182 energy projects benefitting 178 communities (125 completed, 57 still ongoing) (Figure 85). Since 2019, there are an additional 114 energy projects supported by ISC, with an additional 86 completed.

<sup>207</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019). *Indigenous Economic Progress Report*.

Figure 85: National Assessment of Energy Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022

## National Assessment of Energy Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022



Source: Indigenous Services Canada (2023)

- 178 remote and northern Indigenous communities are not connected to the North American energy grid and natural gas infrastructure.
- All 25 communities within Nunavut rely on diesel energy and there is no regional energy grid across the territory.
- An additional 86 energy projects have been completed since 2019, contributing to a total of 125 completed energy projects.
- The proportion of Indigenous involvement within the ownership of renewable energy projects has increased by a substantial amount since 2010.

## Health

Having access to quality, equitable health services leads to earlier diagnosis, decreased morbidity and mortality rates, and contributes to improved physical, mental, emotional and social outcomes. Canada's universal health care system has struggled considerably through and since the COVID-19 pandemic, but even prior to the pandemic, health services were not equally or universally accessible, available, and/or acceptable to all Canadians.

Indigenous Peoples historically have faced many challenges to accessing quality healthcare both in their own communities and in urban areas. The accessibility, availability, and acceptability of healthcare services has directly and indirectly impacted Indigenous Peoples, resulting in continued ongoing health disparities relative to non-Indigenous peoples.<sup>208</sup>

Those Indigenous communities geographically considered remote and special access generally have a higher prevalence of receiving poor quality health-care services in their community compared to rural and urban areas.<sup>209</sup> Often, Indigenous communities in remote and northern areas have to travel, usually down south to urban areas, to access health care.

Theoretically, living in urban areas improves access to health care services (in particular, specialty services) due to availability, but many Indigenous Peoples living in urban areas still face several challenges to accessing healthcare. These challenges include a lack of financial and transportation support and housing near medical services, isolation from social support networks, and lack of culturally appropriate services. Despite these challenges, there now exists many Indigenous-led health care organizations in urban areas. These Indigenous-led health care organizations take a non-hierarchical approach to relationship building, helping community members feel they are being listened to, accommodated, and supported.<sup>210</sup>

Another concern is the lack of infrastructure support to treat mental health and addictions in Indigenous communities. Generally, Indigenous people in remote areas are referred to residential treatment centers far from their home communities.<sup>211</sup> Many First Nation and Inuit communities struggling with addiction and mental health crises do not have the necessary resources to deal with ongoing crisis. This has led some communities to publicly request urgent assistance from both provincial and federal governments.<sup>212</sup>

In 2019, there were 207 ISC led health-related infrastructure projects with 176 completed. Of these 207 projects, 47 were health facility projects (with 27 completed), and 160 were Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve projects (with 149 completed).<sup>213</sup> As of December 31, 2022, there were 257 health-related infrastructure projects, with 205 completed and 52 ongoing (Figure 86). Indigenous head start projects made up 165 projects, while 79 were health facilities and 6 were addiction treatment centers. In total, \$537.4 million has been invested, benefitting 199 First Nations Communities.

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<sup>208</sup> National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. (2019). *Access to health services as a social determinant of First Nations, Inuit and Métis health*.

<sup>209</sup> First Nations Information Governance Centre. (2018). *National Report of The First Nations Regional Health Survey: Phase 3: Volume 2*.

<sup>210</sup> Nelson, S. E., & Wilson, K. (2021). Rights and health versus rights to health: Bringing Indigenous Peoples' legal rights into the spaces of health care services. *Political Geography*, 85.

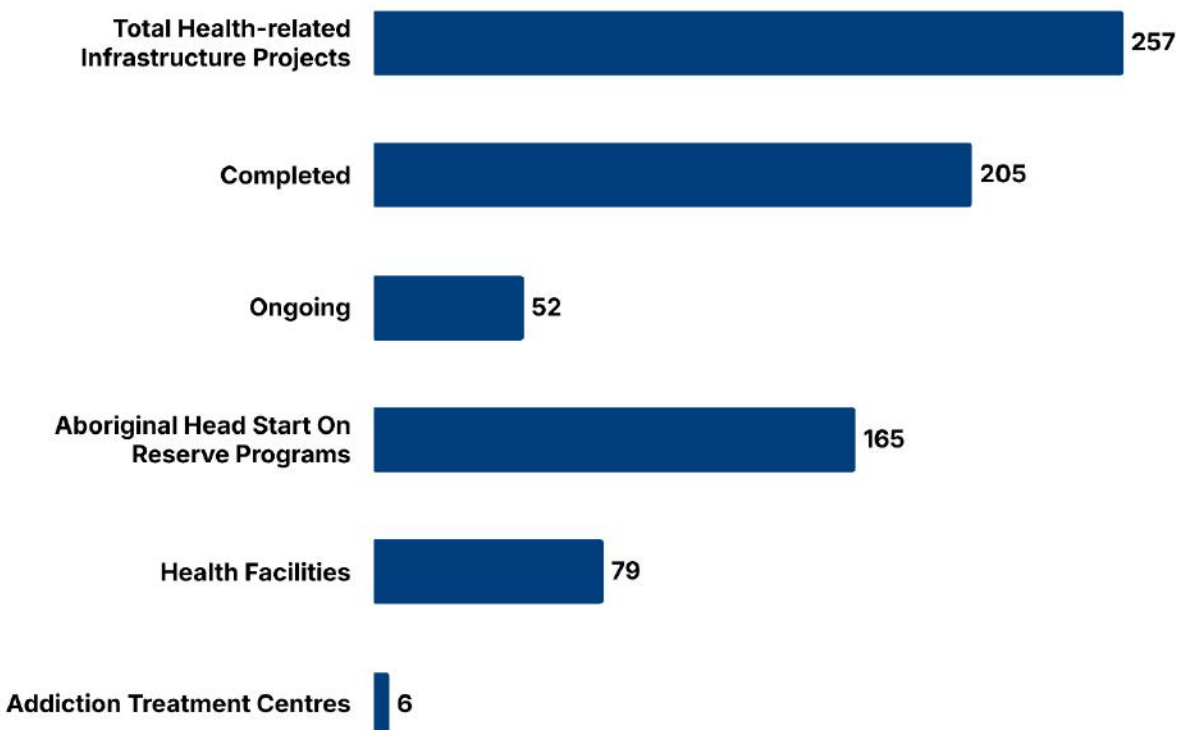
<sup>211</sup> Jiwa, A., Kelly, L., & Pierre-Hansen, N. (2008). Healing the community to heal the individual: literature review of aboriginal community-based alcohol and substance abuse programs. *Canadian Family Physician Medecin de famille canadien*, 54.

<sup>212</sup> Liewicki, N. (2022, November 14). *More than a fifth of God's Lake First Nation residents struggling with addiction: chief*. CBC News.

<sup>213</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019). *Indigenous Economic Progress Report*.

Figure 86: National Assessment of Health-Related Infrastructure Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022

## National Assessment of Health-Related Infrastructure Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022



Source: Indigenous Services Canada (2023)

- The total health-related infrastructure projects increased by 50 since the 2019 *IEPR*, now at a total of 257.
- Most of the increase in health-related infrastructure projects went into health facilities, with an addition of 32 now bringing the total to 79.
- 205 health-related infrastructure projects have been completed since 2016.

## Housing

Housing is a basic human right integral to the enjoyment of other economic, social, and cultural rights. When housing is inadequate, the well-being of individuals, families and communities is substantially affected.<sup>214</sup> Housing is seen as an important social determinant of health, as improved housing can “save

<sup>214</sup> Karamujic, M. H. (2015). Housing: why is it important?. *Housing affordability and housing investment opportunity in Australia*, 8-45.

lives, reduce disease, increase quality of life, reduce poverty, help mitigate climate change and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals, including those addressing health”.<sup>215</sup>

Despite the importance of housing for well-being and health, in a highly developed country like Canada, 1.4 million households across the country were in core housing need.<sup>216</sup> Core housing need is classified when families live in housing considered unsuitable, inadequate, or unaffordable, and no alternative housing in the community exists. In comparison to non-Indigenous households, Indigenous households are 1.4 times more often in core housing need, 1.4 times more likely to live in dwellings that are crowded, and 2 times more likely to live in dwellings in need of major repairs.<sup>217</sup>

This section looks at the progress in housing-related infrastructure faced by all identity groups. This section also considers the quality, suitability, and number of housing infrastructure projects using indicators such as housing conditions, housing suitability, and the total amount of housing projects in First Nations Communities. Data is pulled from the Canadian Census and numbers reported by ISC. The total number of projects reported on are for First Nations Communities, due to availability. Moreover, there are likely housing projects underway in First Nations Communities outside of ISC funding; consequently, these figures may be skewed. For example, Norway House Cree Nation has been working with Bison Modular Homes to meet the housing need by building affordable, innovative homes that are mold proof and fire resistant.<sup>218</sup>

### Housing Conditions

Of all the Indigenous dwellings in Canada, the 2021 Census showed a decrease in the percentage of dwellings in need of major repair compared to the 2016 Census, now at 16.4% of dwellings (Figure 87). Among First Nations and Métis, there was a reduction in the percentage of dwellings in need of major repair, now at 19.1% and 10% respectively, whereas, among Inuit, the value remained unchanged at 26.3%. Among non-Indigenous, the percentage of dwellings in need of repair also dropped to 5.7%. In addition, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous households has decreased as a result of a much larger percentage decrease for Indigenous households. This means Indigenous households have improved from the 2016 Census and, as a result, are much less likely to live in households in need of major repair.

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<sup>215</sup> World Health Organization. (2018, November 26). *Housing impacts health: New WHO guidelines on housing and health*.

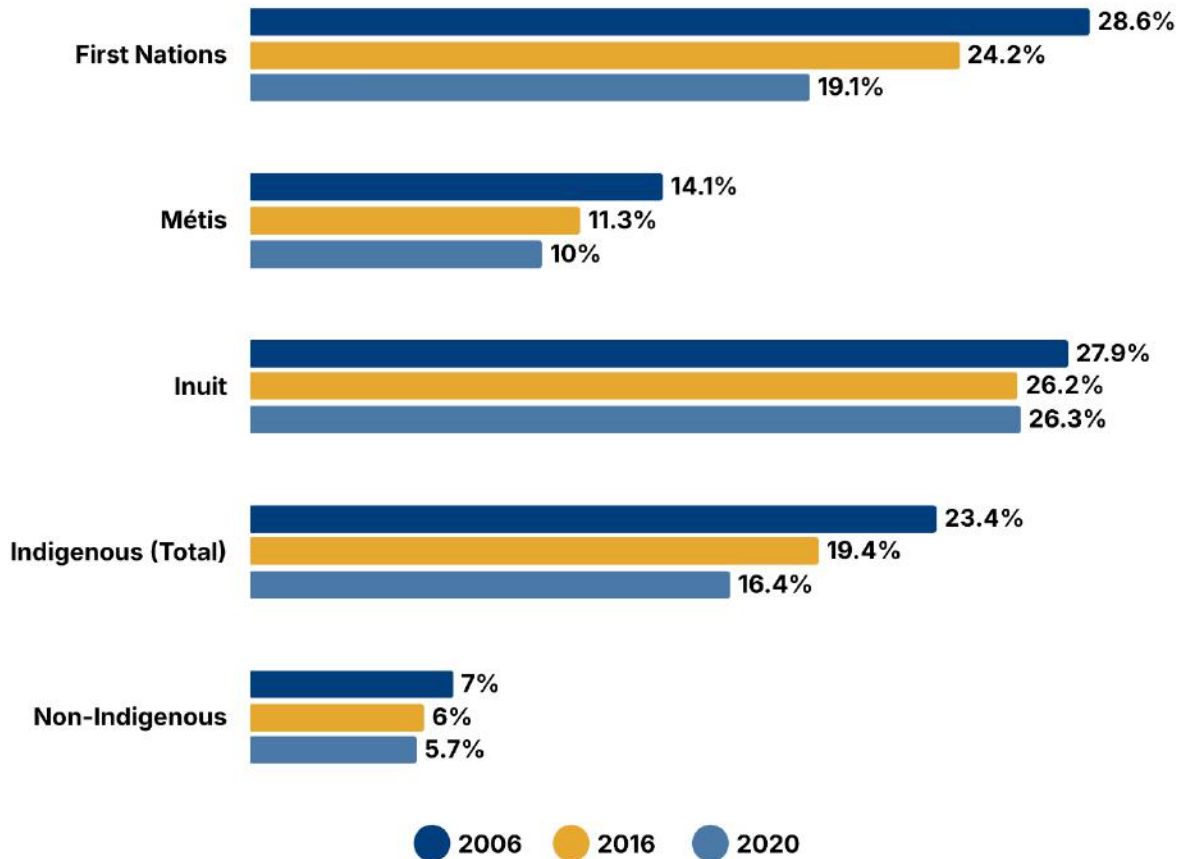
<sup>216</sup> Statistics Canada. (2022).

<sup>217</sup> Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. (2016). *Core housing need data – by the numbers*.

<sup>218</sup> Macyshon, J. (2023, February 20). *A Manitoba First Nation's outside-the-box solution to its housing crisis*. CTV News.

Figure 87: Percent of Population Living in Dwellings in Need of Major Repair by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2020, Canada

## Percent of Population Living in Dwellings in Need of Major Repairs by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2020



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, 2023

### Housing Suitability (Overcrowding)

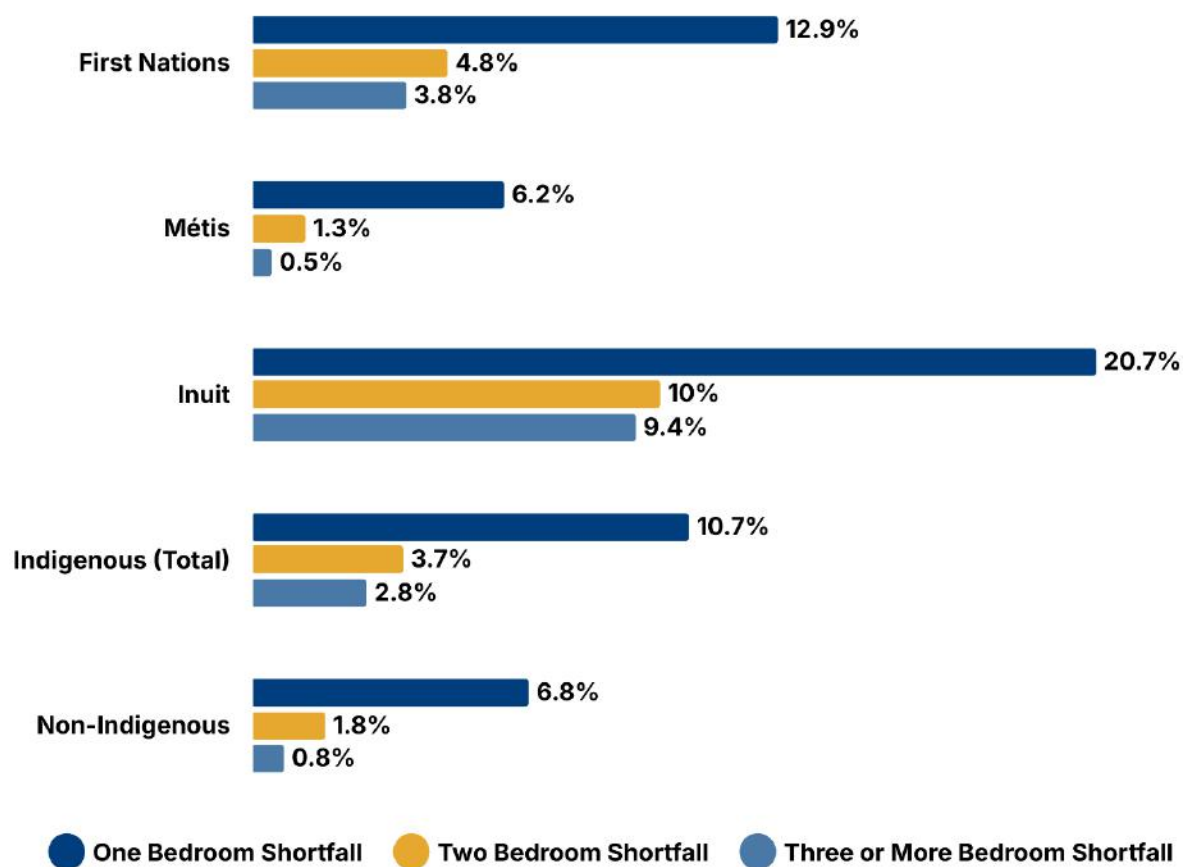
The 2016 Canadian Census revealed that Inuit households were much more likely to live in crowded housing for all three categories (one-bedroom shortfall, two-bedroom shortfall, three-bedroom shortfall). Among all Indigenous households, 11.5% lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 4.0% with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 2.8% with a shortfall of three or more bedrooms; however, for Inuit households, 22.6% lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 11.1% with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 7.4% with a shortfall of three or more bedrooms. Within First Nation households, 14% lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 5% with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 4% with a three or more-bedroom shortfall, and for Métis households, 7% of the lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 1% with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 0.4% with a three or more-bedroom shortfall.

The 2021 Canadian Census demonstrates little change, finding that Inuit were still much more likely to live in crowded housing (Figure 88). Among Inuit, 20.7% of households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 10% with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 9.4% with a three-bedroom shortfall. In contrast, 12.9%

of First Nation households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 4.8% in a two-bedroom shortfall, and 3.8% in a three-bedroom shortfall. 6.2% of Métis households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 1.3% in a two-bedroom shortfall, and 0.5% in a three-bedroom shortfall. Among all Indigenous households, only small changes were observed, with 10.7% of Indigenous households living in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 3.7% in a two-bedroom shortfall, and 2.8% in a three or more-bedroom shortfall. This is in stark contrast to non-Indigenous households, where 6.8% of households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 1.8% of households live in housing with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 0.8% lived in housing with a three-bedroom shortfall. These figures point to a major gap in overcrowding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous households that remains.

**Figure 88: Percent of Dwellings in Not Suitable Housing by Identity Group, 2021**

## Percent of Dwellings in Not Suitable Housing by Identity Group, 2021



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, 2023

In 2019, a total amount of \$547.5 million had been invested into a total of 1,576 housing-related infrastructure projects, resulting in 158 completed new unit constructions and 272 completed unit renovations and additions.<sup>219</sup>

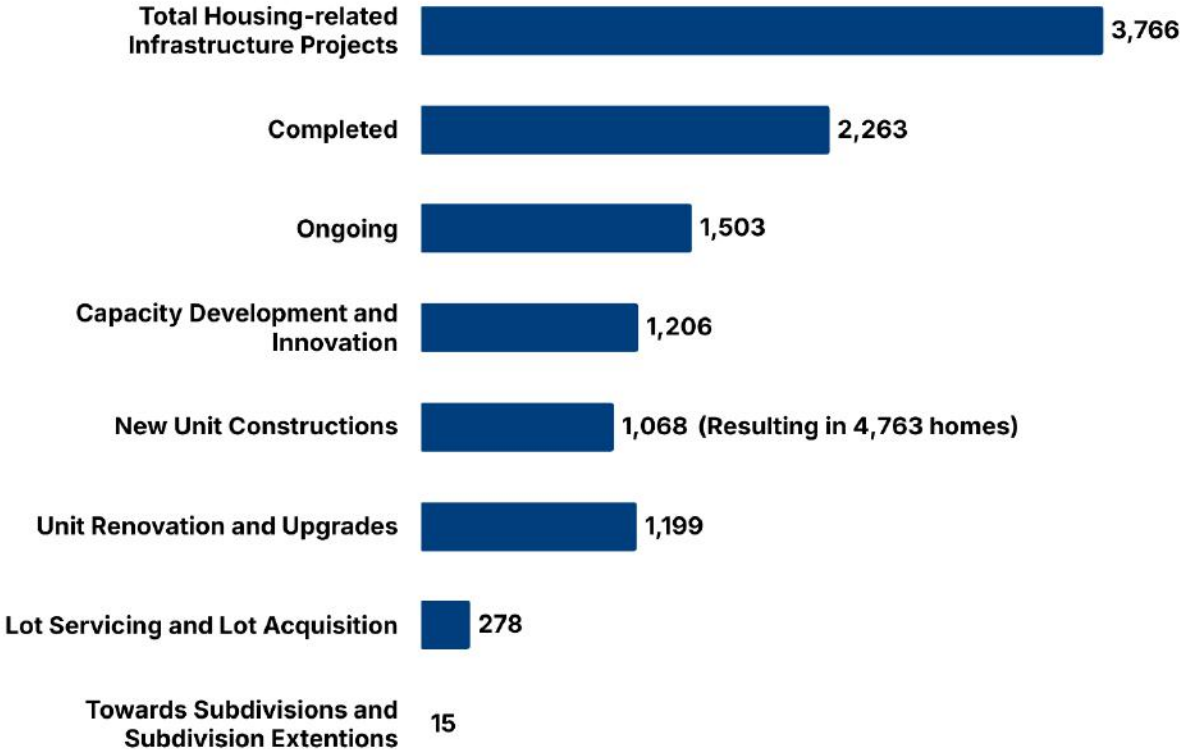
<sup>219</sup> National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019). *Indigenous Economic Progress Report*.



As of December 31, 2022, ISC has invested \$1.38 billion into 3,766 housing-related infrastructure projects, resulting in 4,763 new homes (Figure 89). A total of 2,263 housing-related infrastructure projects were complete, with 1,503 projects still ongoing. In support of improving current housing, a total of 1,199 projects were dedicated to renovations and upgrades. ISC housing investments have more than doubled since 2019, resulting in an additional 2,190 housing projects.

**Figure 89: National Assessment of Housing-Related Infrastructure Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022**

## National Assessment of Housing-Related Infrastructure Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, 2023

- Inuit households continue to experience the most unsuitable housing conditions compared to other Indigenous groups as the percentage of dwellings in need of major repairs remained unchanged since the last census, at 26.2% of dwellings needing major repairs.
- Moreover, Inuit households continue to experience the worst overcrowding conditions compared to other Indigenous groups as they scored the worst on all housing suitability indicators. 20.7% of households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 10% with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 9.4% with a three-bedroom shortfall.
- Métis experience the best outcomes in housing compared to the other Indigenous groups in terms of housing suitability and overcrowding.
- An additional 2,190 housing projects have been added, bringing the total to 3,766, which has resulted in 4,763 new homes in First Nations communities.

## High-speed Broadband

Reliable high-speed internet and mobile services is essential in today's modern world. Having access to telecommunication services provides people with the opportunity to connect with others, provides opportunities to fully participate in the modern digital economy, and enhances the delivery of important services such as healthcare, education, and emergency and public safety services. Still, many Indigenous communities and Peoples do not have reliable, affordable access to high-speed broadband services. In this section, an overview on the current infrastructure situation relating to telecommunications – specifically high-speed – broadband will be discussed. The indicators used are the percentage of First Nation reserves having access to minimum internet speeds of 50/10 Mbps<sup>220</sup>, and give an overview of the connectivity-related infrastructure projects underway with funding from ISC. However, there are communities who are working to close the high-speed broadband infrastructure gap by developing their own connections (outside of ISC support); therefore, this data may not provide the full picture.

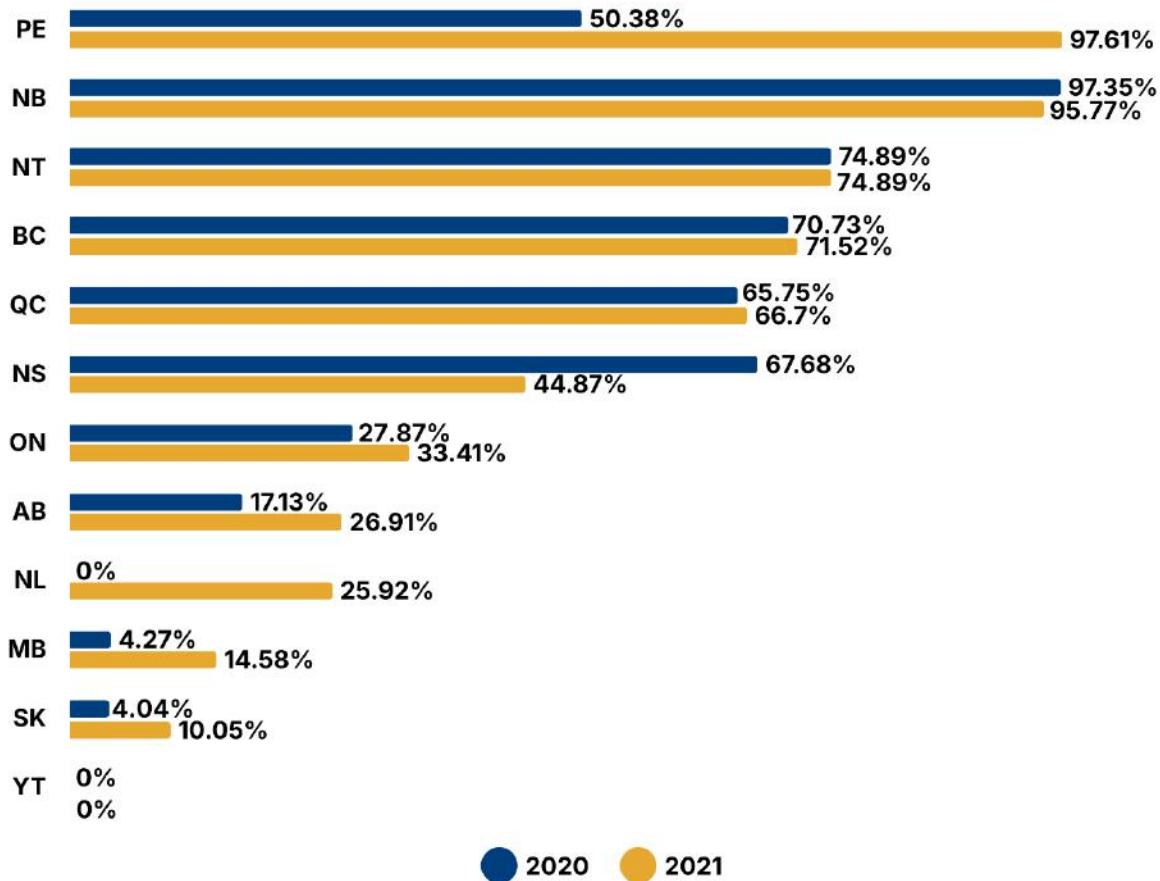
In the 2019 *IEPR*, only 4 out of the 13 provinces had 100% of Indigenous communities with minimum standard internet speeds based on data collected in 2013. However, standards have changed, and the minimum standard internet speed is much higher (for example 50/10 Mbps). As of 2021, none of the provinces and territories had 100% of First Nation reserves with minimum internet speeds of 50/10/unlimited (Figure 90). Only Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick had above 90%. All provinces and territories improved since 2020, except for the Yukon.

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<sup>220</sup> 50/10/Unlimited means download speeds up to 50 megabits per second, upload speeds up to 10 megabits per second with full speed unlimited data.

Figure 90: Percent of First Nation Reserves with Minimum Internet Speeds of 50/10/Unlimited, 2020 and 2021

## Percent of First Nation Reserves with Minimum Internet Speeds of 50/10/Unlimited, 2020 and 2021



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, 2023

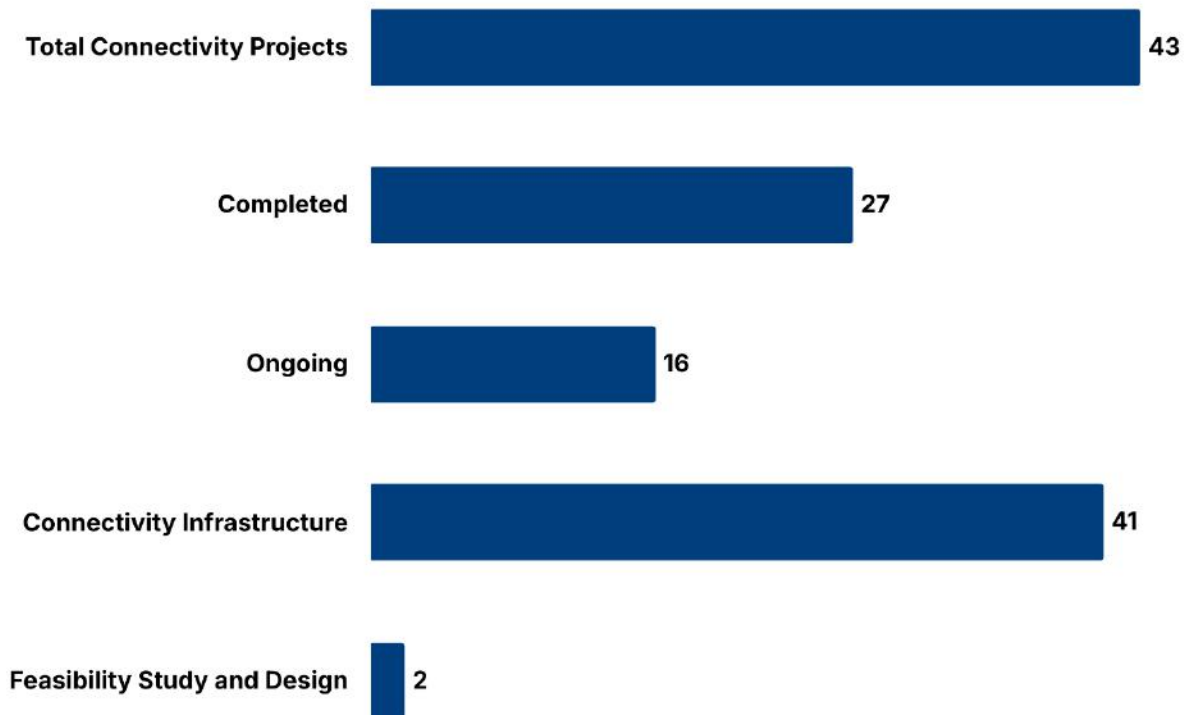
For Inuit in Nunavut, according to the report *Nunavut's Infrastructure Gap*, zero households had access to minimum broadband speeds of 25 Mbps.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, at the time, Nunavut was the only province or territory that did not have a single household with access to those minimum speeds. The next lowest was Yukon, with 60.8% of households having access to minimum broadband speed of 25 Mbps.

In response to the continued lagging behind in access to reliable, affordable high-speed broadband services, the Government of Canada has been assisting First Nations Communities by working with partners to provide access to those minimum internet speeds. As of December 31, 2022, a total of \$83.4 million was invested to support connectivity-related infrastructure projects. However, in some situations, First Nations have taken matters into their own hands and established their own telecommunications businesses, offering high-speed broadband and mobile broadband services.

<sup>221</sup> Nunavut Tunngavik. (2020). *Nunavut's Infrastructure Gap*.

Figure 91: National Assessment of Connectivity<sup>222</sup> Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022

## National Assessment of Connectivity Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, 2023

- Only two provinces had above 90% of households in First Nation reserves with minimum internet speeds of 50/10/unlimited – Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick.
- The total amount of connectivity projects has more than doubled, bringing the total to 43 projects.
- The total amount invested into connectivity was reported to be \$83.4M, which benefitted 287 First Nations Communities.

As of December 31, 2022, ISC reported there was a total of 43 connectivity-related infrastructure projects, 27 completed and 16 still ongoing. Of those 43 total projects, 41 went directly into connectivity infrastructure, whereas 2 went into feasibility and design projects. In the 2019 *IEPR*, a total of 20 connectivity projects were reported, with 12 of those completed (Figure 91). Therefore, the amount of connectivity projects has more than doubled. If all Indigenous communities are to get access to reliable, and affordable high-speed broadband services, more needs to be done.

<sup>222</sup> Connectivity in this context is taken to mean broadband infrastructure that supports high-speed internet access.

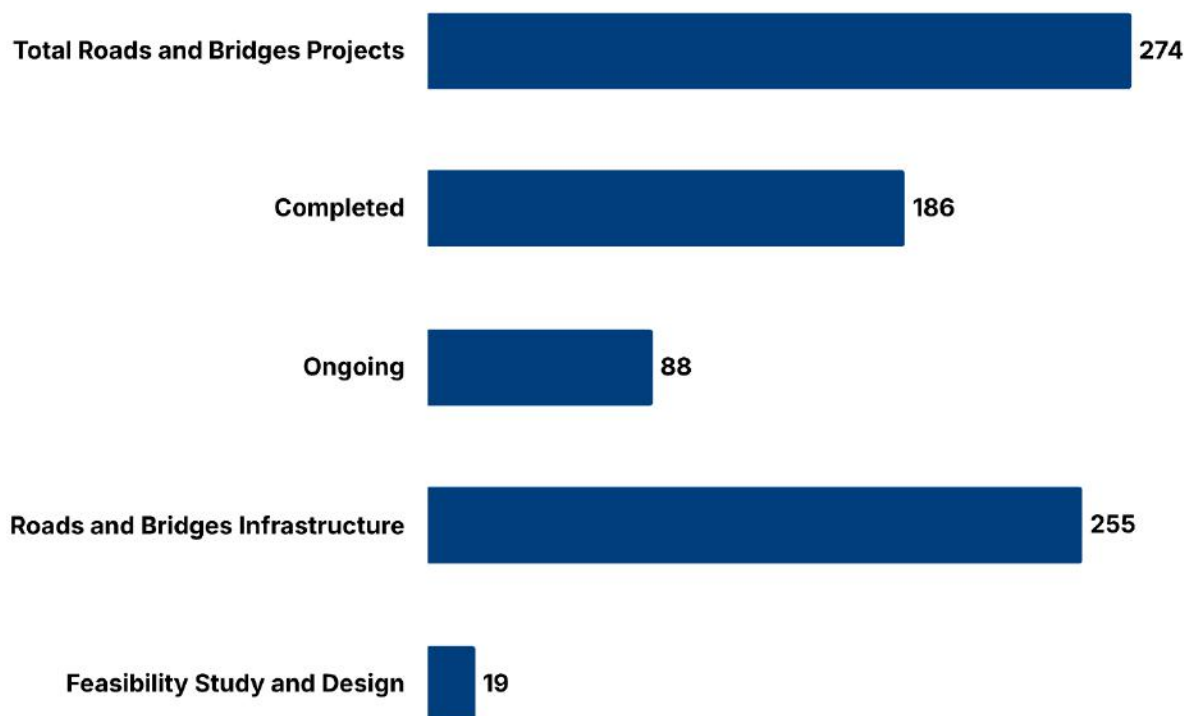
## Transportation

Transportation is essential to a well-functioning economy, as it can be an engine for productivity and improved life for people as extensive and efficient transportation enables entrepreneurs to get their goods and services to markets (facilitates the exchange of goods), reduces the costs of trade, facilitates the movement of workers to jobs, and reduces travel costs for citizens if congestion is managed properly. Many Indigenous communities, especially those in remote and northern geographic locations, lack an adequate transportation infrastructure base, as many do not even have access to roads year-round. Those communities usually rely on air transportation or winter roads during the winter months to access important basic goods and services, often with higher costs due to the higher cost of shipping. This section will examine the investments into transportation infrastructure as reported by the Government of Canada.

As of December 31, 2022, ISC reported \$442.4 million invested into roads and bridges in Indigenous communities, resulting in 274 total projects (Figure 92). Of those 274 projects, 186 were completed and the remaining 88 were still ongoing. A total of 255 projects went directly into roads and bridge infrastructure, whereas 19 projects went into feasibility and design studies. In the 2019 *IEPR*, a total of 81 roads and bridges projects were reported, with only 58 completed at that time. Therefore, an additional 193 transportation projects have been added since the last *IEPR*, with an additional 128 completed.

Figure 92: National Assessment of Roads and Bridges Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022

## National Assessment of Roads and Bridges Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, 2023

- There are a total of 274 roads and bridges projects, 186 completed and the remaining 88 ongoing. This has benefitted 191 First Nations Communities.
- An additional 193 transportation projects were added since the last *IEPR* (2019), with an additional 128 completed.

## Water and Wastewater

Access to clean drinking water is a universal basic human right, however many Indigenous Peoples across Canada still face challenges with accessing clean drinking water. The 2012 benchmarking report set a target that 100% of First Nations Communities would have drinking water quality that met the prescribed health standards in the guidelines for Canadian drinking water quality by 2022. Moreover, a commitment by the Government of Canada was made to end all long-term drinking water advisories by March 2021.

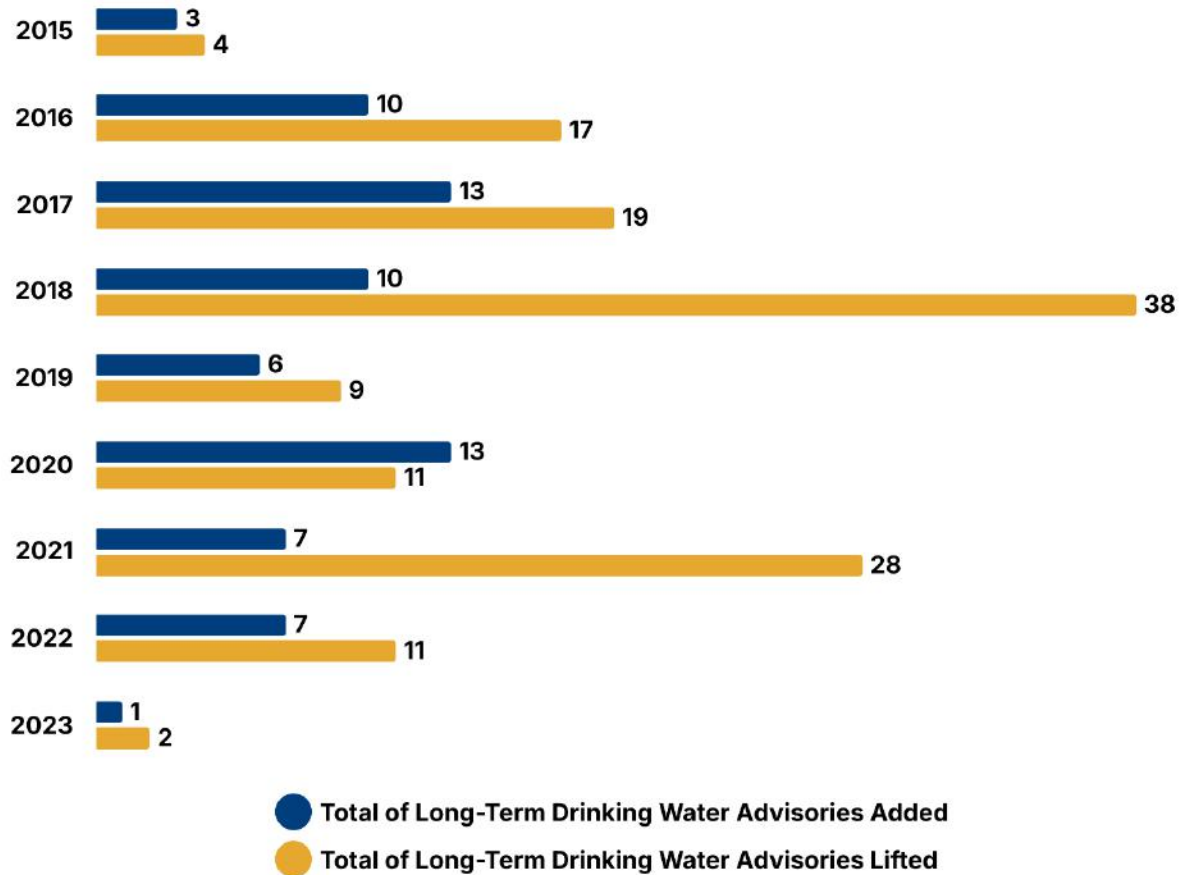
Unfortunately, neither of those targets were achieved. As of May 4, 2023, 139 long-term drinking water advisories (DWAs) had been lifted since November 2015; however, 31 long-term drinking water advisories in 27 communities across Canada remain (Figure 93). More than half of those long-term DWAs lifted were

from Ontario. Of the remaining 31 long-term drinking water advisories, they are located in Manitoba, Ontario, and Saskatchewan, with a majority affecting 20 communities in Ontario (Figure 94).

**Figure 93: Progress on Lifting Long-Term Drinking Water Advisories in Canada as of May 4, 2023**

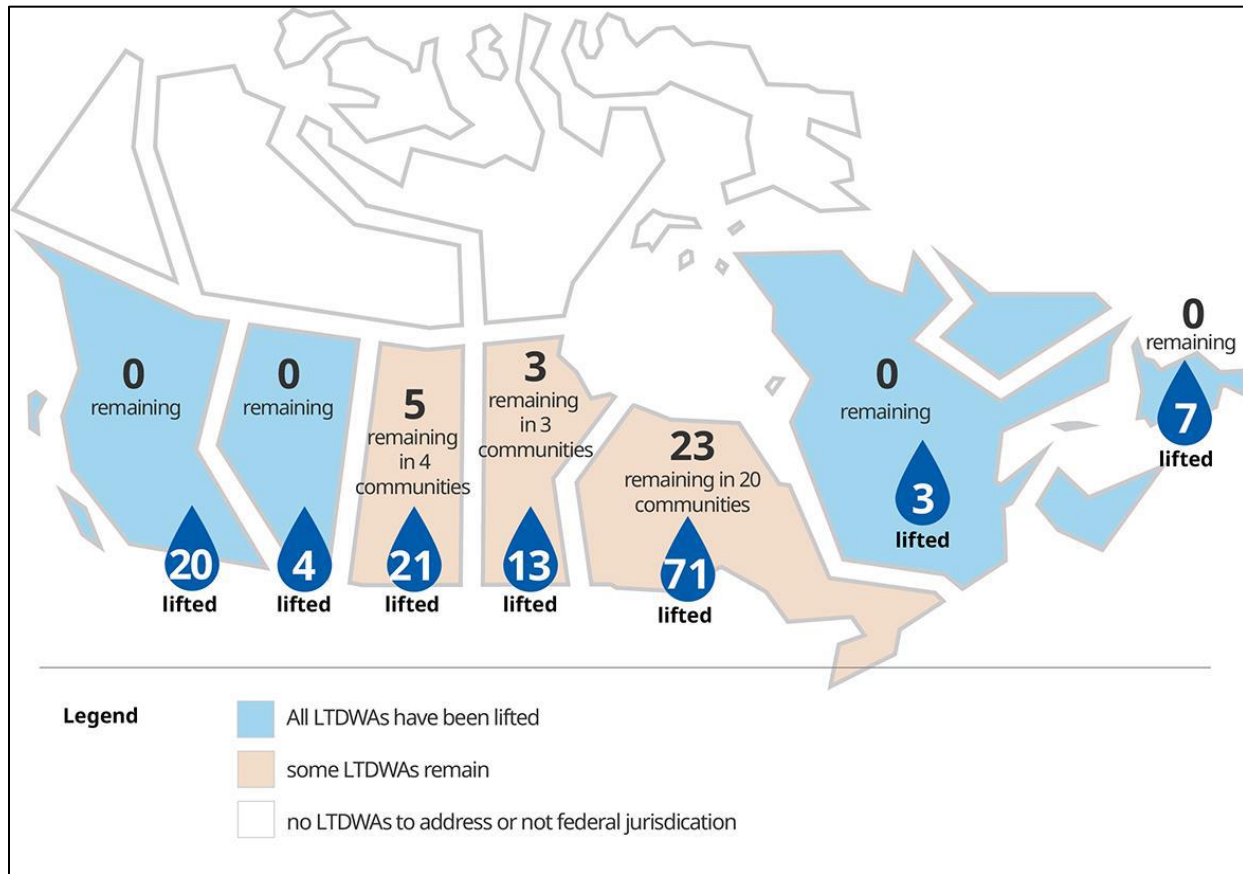
## Progress on Lifting Long-Term Drinking Water Advisories in Canada as of May 4, 2023

139 long-term drinking water advisories lifted since November 2015  
31 long-term drinking water advisories in effect in 27 communities



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, 2022

**Figure 94: Remaining Long-Term Drinking Water Advisories in Canada**



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, 2022

In support of improving the infrastructure gap in water and wastewater, ISC has reported that there existed 1,058 projects across Canada, of which 525 are completed and 533 are ongoing. A total of 123 projects focused on new water and wastewater treatment plants/lagoons, with 73 completed and 50 ongoing. 705 projects went into renovations and upgrades to existing water and wastewater systems, of which 359 have been completed and 346 are ongoing. 131 projects went into feasibility studies and designs, of which 34 are completed and 97 are ongoing. 99 went into supporting projects and initiatives, of which 59 are completed and 40 are ongoing (Figure 95). In the 2019 *IEPR*, there was a total of 505 projects, of which 191 were completed and 314 were ongoing. Since the last *IEPR*, the reported number of projects dedicated to water and wastewater has more than doubled.



**Figure 95: National Assessment of Indigenous Water and Wastewater Projects by Indigenous Services Canada, as of December 31, 2022 (Cumulative since April 2016)**



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, 2023

- The number of long-term drinking water advisories is now considerably less as 139 were lifted since November 2015, leaving only 31 long-term drinking water advisories in effect.
- The target set out in the 2012 benchmarking report that 100 percent of First Nations Communities have clean and safe drinking water has not been achieved.
- The commitments to lift all advisories by March 2021 set out by the federal government has not been achieved, as many long-term and short-term drinking water advisories still exist in 2023.

## Conclusion

As this chapter has demonstrated, the colonial policy oversight that governs Indigenous Peoples as a whole, and particularly in the infrastructure space, has created significant gaps in the infrastructure that is accessible in Indigenous communities. This has lasting impacts on the population in terms of accessing education and attainment rates, access to safe and reliable energy sources, and even access to a basic fundamental need such as clean drinking water.

The Government of Canada has proposed a series of “quick remedies” aimed at temporarily improving the state of infrastructure in Indigenous communities by increasing short-term funding for various projects. While this temporarily mitigates some issues, it does not allow for true reconciliation and the self-determined ability for Indigenous communities to manage and maintain infrastructure on their own lands. Despite this, continued efforts must be made to ensure that the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous infrastructure is closed. Efforts must continue towards ensuring that every Indigenous community has access to clean and safe drinking water, at a minimum.

The inability of the Government of Canada to recognize the historical injustices that have impacted Indigenous communities undermines the ability for sustainable and efficient infrastructure development to occur in Indigenous communities. In order for real meaningful change to occur, greater efforts should

be made to transfer infrastructure control to Indigenous communities, including reform and transformative change to the Indigenous infrastructure policy. This may include further and ongoing commitments to develop capacity in Indigenous communities to maintain infrastructure, human resources, and testing protocols so that Indigenous community members may effectively manage their own infrastructure and not rely on outside sources.

In addition, the Government of Canada must recognize that Indigenous businesses are best placed to explore ways to increase connectivity or to determine ways to improve infrastructure writ large on their lands. Using Indigenous businesses in this space will also build technological capacity through employment.

#### 2019 IEPR Recommendations Related to Infrastructure

- ***Ongoing and expanded investments are required to ensure homes are repaired and new homes are built.***
- ***Bring high-speed broadband and mobile services to Indigenous communities.***
- ***Update the Infrastructure Index Report every two years.***

#### 2024 IEPR Recommendations Related to Infrastructure

- ***Transform the Government of Canada’s Community Infrastructure Policy to provide increased Indigenous control over infrastructure management and access on their lands.***
- ***Increase funding for accessible and culturally relevant spaces for vulnerable Indigenous community members, including for Elders and senior Indigenous individuals, as well as those dealing with addictions, criminality, and homelessness.***
- ***Increase funding and support for the construction and renovation of critical infrastructure in Indigenous communities, including regulated child-care facilities, post-secondary facilities, and addressing housing gaps, particularly in Inuit communities, while recognizing the significant capital costs in rural and remote regions.***
- ***Invest in capacity-building initiatives to enable Indigenous communities to manage and maintain their infrastructure.***
- ***Increase Indigenous involvement and ownership in renewable energy projects to promote sustainable energy solutions.***

## NIEDB ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INDICES

Indices were derived to compare overall outcomes between population groups when examining all indicators together. The core indicators focus on economic outcomes by tracking key employment and income measures. The underlying indicators track factors that directly contribute to improving economic outcomes for Indigenous people. These factors focus on measures of entrepreneurial activity, education and indicators of infrastructure conditions that can each influence economic outcomes in terms of employment success and earnings potential. For more information on the methodology used to develop this index, please refer to Annex E.

Separate indices were derived by population group for the core and underlying indicators. As well, an overall NIEDB Economic Development Index was derived that consolidates the outcomes from the core and underlying indicators to assess how overall outcomes for the Indigenous population have compared with the non-Indigenous population. The selection of indicators used in the indices include all core and underlying indicators for which data was available for all seven population groups reported in the Indigenous Economic Progress Report.

- **Core Indicators Index:** Employment; Labour Force Participation; Unemployment; Median Income; Proportion of Income from Transfers.
- **Underlying Indicators Index:** High School Completion; College/Trades Completion; University Completion; Entrepreneurship-Self-Employment; Housing Quantity (crowded conditions); Housing Quality (in need of major repairs).
- **NIEDB Economic Development Index:** includes all indicators listed above.

The index score for a population group for each of these indices is a single number that ranges from a low of 0 (lowest outcomes) to a high score of 100 (highest outcomes). These scores are used to compare outcomes across Indigenous heritage groups with the non-Indigenous population. Annex C has further details on the methodology used for deriving the NIEDB indices.

### NIEDB Economic Development Index Scores Main Findings:

Table 1 shows the changes in index scores for each distinction group from 2016 to 2021. Most distinction groups experienced an increase in scores over this time period. Scores increased the most for First Nations on reserve, reflecting increases in both core and underlying indicators. Scores decreased for the Inuit population. Métis scores were essentially unchanged overall reflecting increases in underlying indicators that were offset by decreases in core indicators.

- For the total Indigenous population, the overall NIEDB Economic Development Index score increased more than for the non-Indigenous population from 2016 to 2021.
- Métis continued to have the highest index scores among Indigenous distinction groups. The Inuit population was the only population group to experience a drop in the overall index score from 2016 to 2021.
- Index scores remained lowest for First Nations on reserve but improved from 2016 to 2021, reflecting increases in both core and underlying indicators.

Table 1 – Economic Indices Scores - Range from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest)

	FIRST NATIONS (on reserve)	FIRST NATIONS (off reserve)	FIRST NATIONS (total)	INUIT	MÉTIS	INDIGENOUS (total)	NON-INDIGENOUS
<b>2016</b>							
Core Indicators Index	56.9	69.5	65.6	67.7	75.6	69.7	76.8
Underlying Indicators Index	37.6	52.2	48.2	39.9	55.5	50.3	58.1
NIEDB Economic Development Index	47.3	60.8	56.9	53.8	65.6	60.0	67.4
<b>2021</b>							
Core Indicators Index	58.4	69.0	66.5	66.9	74.2	69.2	75.1
Underlying Indicators Index	39.5	53.7	49.9	39.7	57.0	51.9	60.4
NIEDB Economic Development Index	48.9	61.3	58.2	53.3	65.6	60.6	67.7
<b>Change in Index Scores 2016 to 2021*</b>							
Core Indicators Index	1.4	-0.5	0.9	-0.8	-1.4	-0.5	-1.7
Underlying Indicators Index	1.9	1.5	1.7	-0.3	1.4	1.6	2.3
NIEDB Economic Development Index	1.7	0.5	1.3	-0.5	0.0	0.5	0.3

\*Changes may not appear exact due to rounding.

Core Indicators Index: Employment; Labour Force Participation; Unemployment; Median Income; Proportion of Income from Transfers.

Underlying Indicators Index: High School Completion; College/Trades Completion; University Completion; Entrepreneurship-Self-Employment; Housing Quantity (crowded conditions); Housing Quality (in need of major repairs).  
NIEDB Economic Development Index: Includes all indicators above.

## Gaps with the Non-Indigenous Population

Overall, the gap between the total Indigenous population and the non-Indigenous population for the NIEDB Economic Development Index decreased between 2016 and 2021. This reflected relatively stronger increases in core indicators by the Indigenous population compared to the non-Indigenous population (Table 2). The gap with the non-Indigenous population increased the most for the Inuit population. The overall gap decreased for the First Nation population reflecting decreases in the gap for First Nations both on and off reserve.

Table 2 – Gaps with the Non-Indigenous Population

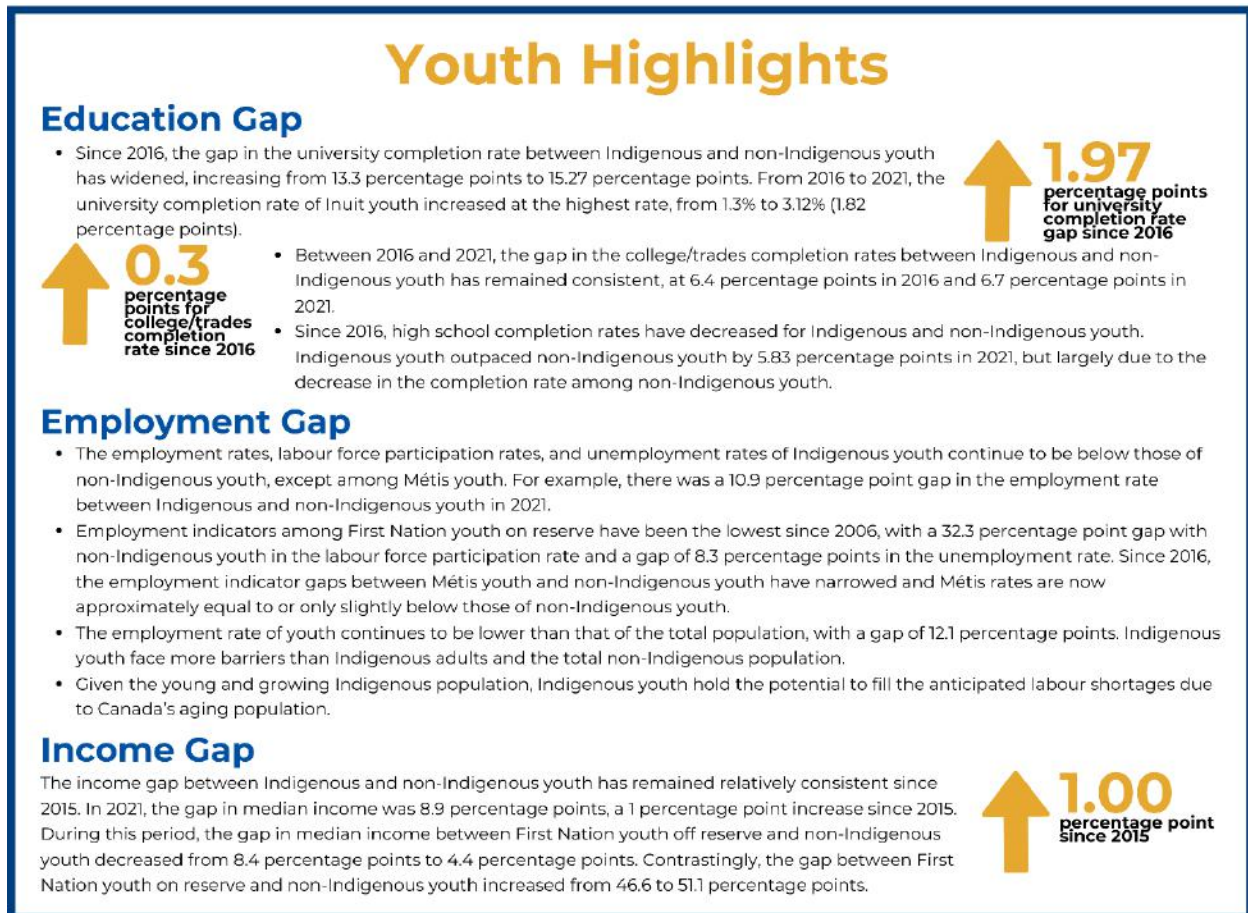
	FIRST NATIONS (on reserve)	FIRST NATIONS (off reserve)	FIRST NATIONS (total)	INUIT	MÉTIS	INDIGENOUS (total)	NON-INDIGENOUS
<b>2016</b>							
Core Indicators Index	-19.8	-7.3	-11.2	-9.1	-1.2	-7.0	-
Underlying Indicators Index	-20.5	-5.9	-9.9	-18.2	-2.6	-7.8	-
NIEDB Economic Development Index	-20.1	-6.6	-10.5	-13.6	-1.9	-7.4	-
<b>2021</b>							
Core Indicators Index	-16.7	-6.1	-8.6	-8.1	-0.9	-5.9	-
Underlying Indicators Index	-20.9	-6.7	-10.5	-20.7	-3.5	-8.5	-
NIEDB Economic Development Index	-18.8	-6.4	-9.6	-14.4	-2.2	-7.2	-
<b>Change in Gaps</b>							
<b>2016 to 2021</b>							
Core Indicators Index	3.1	1.2	2.6	0.9	0.3	1.2	-
Underlying Indicators Index	-0.4	-0.8	-0.6	-2.6	-0.9	-0.7	-
NIEDB Economic Development Index	1.3	0.2	1.0	-0.8	-0.3	0.2	-

Gaps may not appear exact due to rounding.

## A LOOK AT YOUTH

*“If we can raise a generation of First Nations kids who never have to recover from their childhoods, and a generation of non-Indigenous children who never have to say they’re sorry, then I think we have made a major step in co-creating a society that our ancestors always dreamed of, and that our great-great-great grandchildren would be proud of.”*

– Dr. Cindy Blackstock



## Introduction

The Indigenous population is young and growing and thus, holds immense economic potential. As of 2020, one in every 13 people in Canada younger than the age of 18 was Indigenous (adjusted for 2016 Census data).<sup>223</sup> Since 2016, the total Indigenous population has grown by 9.4%, with the First Nation population growing by 9.7%, the Inuit population by 8.5%, and the Métis population by 6.3%. Indigenous youth represent an opportunity to fill the anticipated labour shortages due to Canada’s aging population, but access to quality education and skills and employment training will be critical.

<sup>223</sup> Indigenous Institutes Consortium. (2020). *Programs & Services: A Comparative Analysis*.

This chapter considers the progress of several education and employment indicators concerning Indigenous youth. While Indigenous communities and organizations have varying definitions of “youth,” Indigenous youth are defined as individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age in this report to maintain consistency with Census data.

## Background

Indigenous youth face significant barriers to achieving parity with non-Indigenous youth in educational attainment and labour market participation. Indigenous youth have long been overrepresented in many harmful statistical categories, including incarceration, child apprehension, suicide rates, and domestic violence.

- In 2020-2021, Indigenous youth accounted for 50% of youth admissions to custody/correctional services, while representing approximately 8% of the youth population in Canada.
- Male Indigenous youth accounted for 48% of youth male admissions to custody/correctional services, while female Indigenous youth accounted for 62% of youth female admissions.<sup>224</sup>
- In 2021, Indigenous children under the age of 14 accounted for 53.8% of children in foster care. This is an increase from 52.2% in 2016.<sup>225</sup>
- The suicide rate of Indigenous youth aged 15 to 24 years is 5 to 6 times that of non-Indigenous youth. The suicide rate among Inuit youth is 11 times the national average.<sup>226</sup>
- In 2018, 38% of Indigenous Peoples experienced childhood victimization, including physical and sexual abuse, whereas 27% of non-Indigenous people experienced childhood victimization.<sup>227</sup>

Many factors have and continue to influence these social issues, including the impacts of residential schools, experience in the child welfare system, the loss of land, family and community history of substance abuse and mental health issues, barriers to education, marginalization, abuse and violence, and poverty.<sup>228</sup>

Despite many barriers, Indigenous youth across Canada are demonstrating resilience and making incredible achievements. Many Indigenous-led organizations, like Indspire, recognize the achievements of Indigenous youth. In 2024, Indspire recognized three Indigenous youth for their success: Adam Gauthier, Braden Kadlun, and Dr. Jayelle Friesen-Enns. They were recognized for their work in the spaces of child, youth, and family support, content creation and motivational speaking, and healthcare, respectively.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Statistics Canada. (2022, April 20). *Adult and youth correctional statistics, 2020/2021*.

<sup>225</sup> Indigenous Services Canada. (2024, May 24). *Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care*.

<sup>226</sup> Giroux, R., Homer, K., Kassam, S., Pokrupa, T., Robinson, J. Sauve, A., & Sumner, A. (2018). *Mental health and suicide in Indigenous communities in Canada*. Canadian Federation of Medical Students.

<sup>227</sup> Heidinger, L. (2022, December 12). *Profile of Canadians who experienced victimization during childhood, 2018*. Statistics Canada.

<sup>228</sup> Loppie, S., Reading, C., & de Leeuw, S. (2020). Indigenous Experiences with Racism and its Impacts. *Social Determinants of Health*. National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health.

<sup>229</sup> Indspire. (2024). *Indspire Award Recipients (Laureates)*.



AFOA Canada and Nutrien have also partnered to offer the Annual Nutrien Indigenous Youth Financial Management Awards, which are awarded to students pursuing a post-secondary education in financial management. 48 Indigenous youth from across Canada have received the award since 2007.

The Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (Cando) also hosts an annual National Youth Panel that showcases six Indigenous youth, selected for their strength, initiative, accomplishments, entrepreneurial spirit, and participation within their communities. In 2023, the youth panelists were Macyn Morning Bull, Justin Langan, Kathleen Doxtator, Brayden Omeasoo-Steinhauer, Kianna Bear-Hetherington, and Reanna Merasty.<sup>230</sup>

## Education

Educational attainment, especially at the post-secondary level, provides numerous economic benefits to Indigenous individuals and communities. As discussed in the chapter “Underlying Indicator #1: Education”, educational attainment is tied to improved employment opportunities and higher income levels. The high school, college/trades, and university completion rates for Indigenous youth aged 20 to 24 years are below those for adults aged 25 to 65 years. Since 2016, high school and college/trades completion rates have declined across all identity groups, whereas university completion rates have improved.

Among all identity groups, including the non-Indigenous youth population, high school completion rates decreased since 2016. The high school completion rate decreased from 91.80% in 2016 to 45.96% in 2021 for the non-Indigenous youth population, which is a decrease of 45.84 percentage points. This decrease was larger than that of all Indigenous identity groups, with the highest being among the Métis youth population, who saw a decrease of 28.15 percentage points (from 83.80% in 2016 to 55.65% in 2021). Contrastingly, First Nation youth on reserve experienced a decrease of 4.59 percentage points, specifically from 48.40% in 2016 to 43.81% in 2021. This completion rate still remains below that of all identity groups, except for Inuit youth. Inuit youth, who had a higher rate than that of First Nation youth on reserve in 2016, had the lowest completion rate in 2021 at 38.16%. Due to the large decrease in the completion rate in the non-Indigenous population, Indigenous youth in total outpaced non-Indigenous youth by 5.83 percentage points in 2021, at 51.79% and 45.96%, respectively.

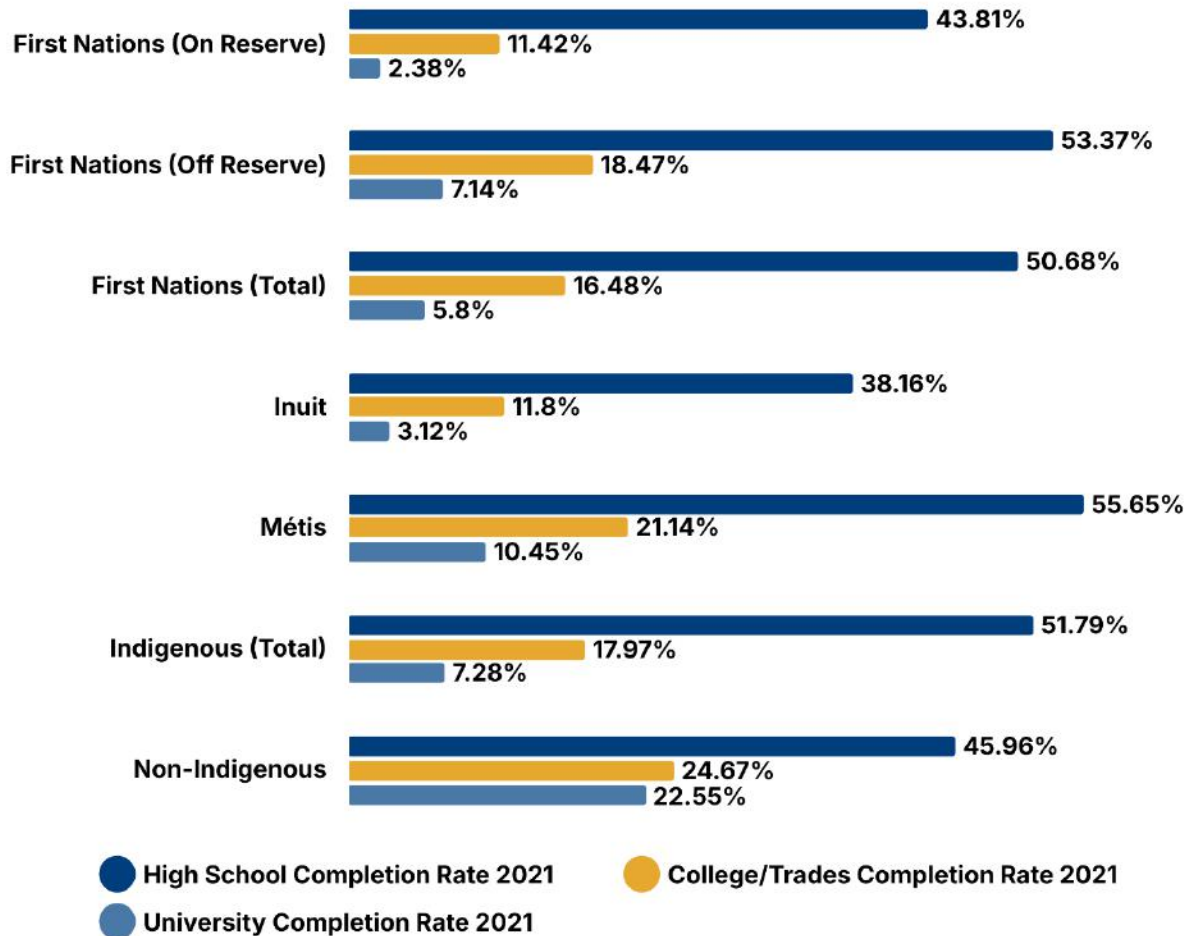
The proportion of youth who completed college and trades education decreased marginally across all identity groups since 2016. For all Indigenous youth, the college/trades completion rate decreased from 20.10% in 2016 to 17.97% in 2021 (2.13 percentage point decrease). For non-Indigenous youth, the completion rate decreased from 26.50% in 2016 to 24.67% in 2021, which is a decrease of 1.83 percentage points. Among Indigenous identity groups, the completion rate for First Nation youth off reserve saw the largest decrease at 2.63 percentage points, specifically from 21.10% in 2016 to 18.47% in 2021. The gap between the completion rate of Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth remained relatively consistent between 2016 and 2021, at 6.4 percentage points and 6.7 percentage points, respectively (Figure 96).

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<sup>230</sup> Cando. (2024). *National Youth Panel*.

Figure 96: High School, College/Trades and University Completion Rates (20 to 24 Years) by Identity Group, 2021, Canada

## High School, College/Trades and University Completion Rates (20 to 24 Years) by Identity Group, 2021

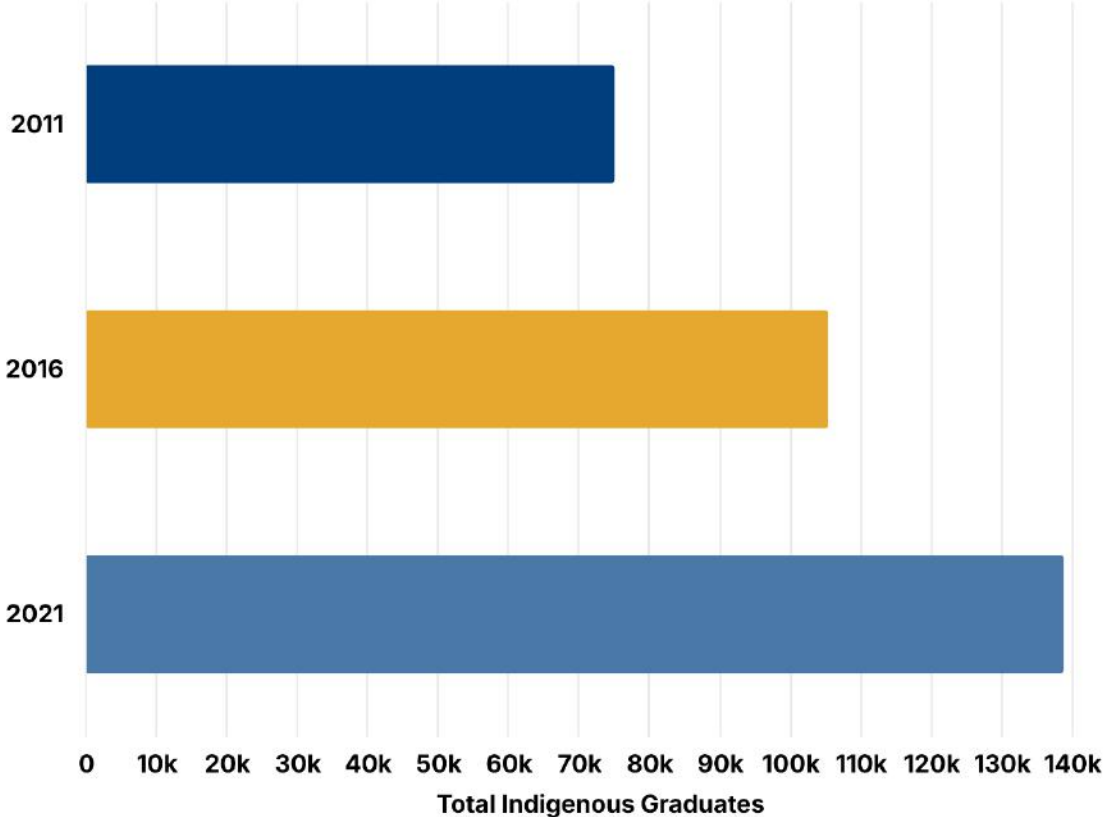


Source: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and 2021 Census

University completion rates for youth aged 20 to 24 years saw small improvements in the period from 2016 to 2021. The university completion rate for non-Indigenous youth saw the largest increase, from 19.70% in 2016 to 22.55% in 2021 (2.85 percentage point increase). Among Indigenous identity groups, the university completion rate for Inuit youth increased at the highest rate by 1.82 percentage points, from 1.30% in 2016 to 3.12% in 2021. There was a widening of the gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous youth's completion rates since 2016, from 13.30 percentage points in 2016 to 15.27 percentage points in 2021 (Figure 97).

Figure 97: Total Number of People of Indigenous Identity with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, 2011, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Total Number of People of Indigenous Identity with a Bachelor's Degree or Higher, 2011, 2016 and 2021



Source: Statistics Canada Catalogue Table 98-10-0432; original analysis by the Deloitte Future of Canada Centre

While the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations still exists, Deloitte Future of Canada Centre posits that Indigenous Peoples are making significant gains in completing university degrees.

Many youth recognize that despite the many barriers to post-secondary education, university empowers Indigenous youth to make a positive impact in their lives and their communities. Speaking about their university experience, Deloitte’s survey participants felt that “for the most part, it gave them the knowledge and confidence to inspire other local youth, have a voice, and eventually impact policymaking. They felt it was important for them to complete their post-secondary education to realize their aspirations.”<sup>231</sup> However, it is important to note that university is not a positive experience for all Indigenous students, as some experience a lack of support, academic difficulties, and difficulty being away from their homes and communities.

<sup>231</sup> Deloitte Future of Canada. (2023). Bridging Study and Work for Long-Term Success. *Voices of Indigenous youth leaders on reconciliation, 2*. Catalyst.

As mentioned in the 2019 IEPR, universities are continuing to implement initiatives to advance reconciliation and retain Indigenous students. Among those surveyed by Deloitte Future of Canada Centre, 70% indicated that they somewhat or frequently saw Indigenous worldviews and learning incorporated in their most recent post-secondary experience.<sup>232</sup> Indspire also reported that, in 2023, of the 109 post-secondary institutions that it polled about the TRC's Calls to Action, 51 responded that they had created an Indigenization and reconciliation plan, and 46 reported that they had Indigenization efforts, but with no concrete plan or strategy.<sup>233</sup>

Additionally, post-secondary institutions are partnering with Indigenous communities and introducing Indigenous-focused programs and curriculum. In 2022, over 50% of universities across Canada offered community-based learning programs for Indigenous students, created in consultation with Elders. 73% of institutions across Canada also had programs with an Indigenous specialization or focus or that were specifically designed for Indigenous students.<sup>234</sup>

Indigenous groups across Canada also mandate, govern, and control their own post-secondary institutions, which offer education grounded in Indigenous languages, pedagogies, cultures, and worldviews. In 2020, the Conference Board of Canada reported that, over a 15-year period, the number of Indigenous Institutes increased by about 15%, to a total of about 80 institutions. These Institutes differ in whether they serve one community, or multiple with a network of satellite campuses. At this point in time, there is no active national association of Indigenous Institutes.<sup>235</sup> According to the Indigenous Institutes Consortium, which represents seven Indigenous Institutes in Ontario, the success of Indigenous Institutes contributes to long-term economic wealth in Indigenous communities, including labour market outcomes, capacity for upgrading/reskilling/upskilling, income growth, and employment and entrepreneurship opportunities.<sup>236</sup>

## Employment Measures

Employment indicators (employment rate, labour force participation rate, and unemployment rate) for Indigenous youth ages 15 to 24 continue to be below those of non-Indigenous youth, except among Métis. First Nation youth on reserve have experienced significantly worse employment indicators than other groups since 2006, with a labour force participation rate of 28.7% and an unemployment rate of 27.6% in 2021. Comparatively, the rates for non-Indigenous youth are 61.0% and 19.3%, respectively. However, the employment indicators for Indigenous youth are slowly improving.

Since 2016, the employment indicator gaps between Métis youth and non-Indigenous youth have narrowed and Métis rates are now approximately equal to or only slightly below those of non-Indigenous youth. In 2016, the employment rates were 52.3% for Métis youth and 52.8% for non-Indigenous youth (a gap of 0.5 percentage points). In 2021, this gap narrowed to 0.1 percentage points, with their employment rates being 49.2% and 49.3%, respectively. In 2021, the labour force participation rate of Métis youth is higher than that of non-Indigenous youth (62.1% versus 61.0%) and the gaps between the

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<sup>232</sup> Deloitte Future of Canada. (2023). Bridging Study and Work for Long-Term Success. *Voices of Indigenous youth leaders on reconciliation*, 2. Catalyst.

<sup>233</sup> Summers, K. (2023). *Paths to Reconciliation: An Overview of the Current Educational Landscape*. Indspire.

<sup>234</sup> Universities Canada. (N/A). *Our position*.

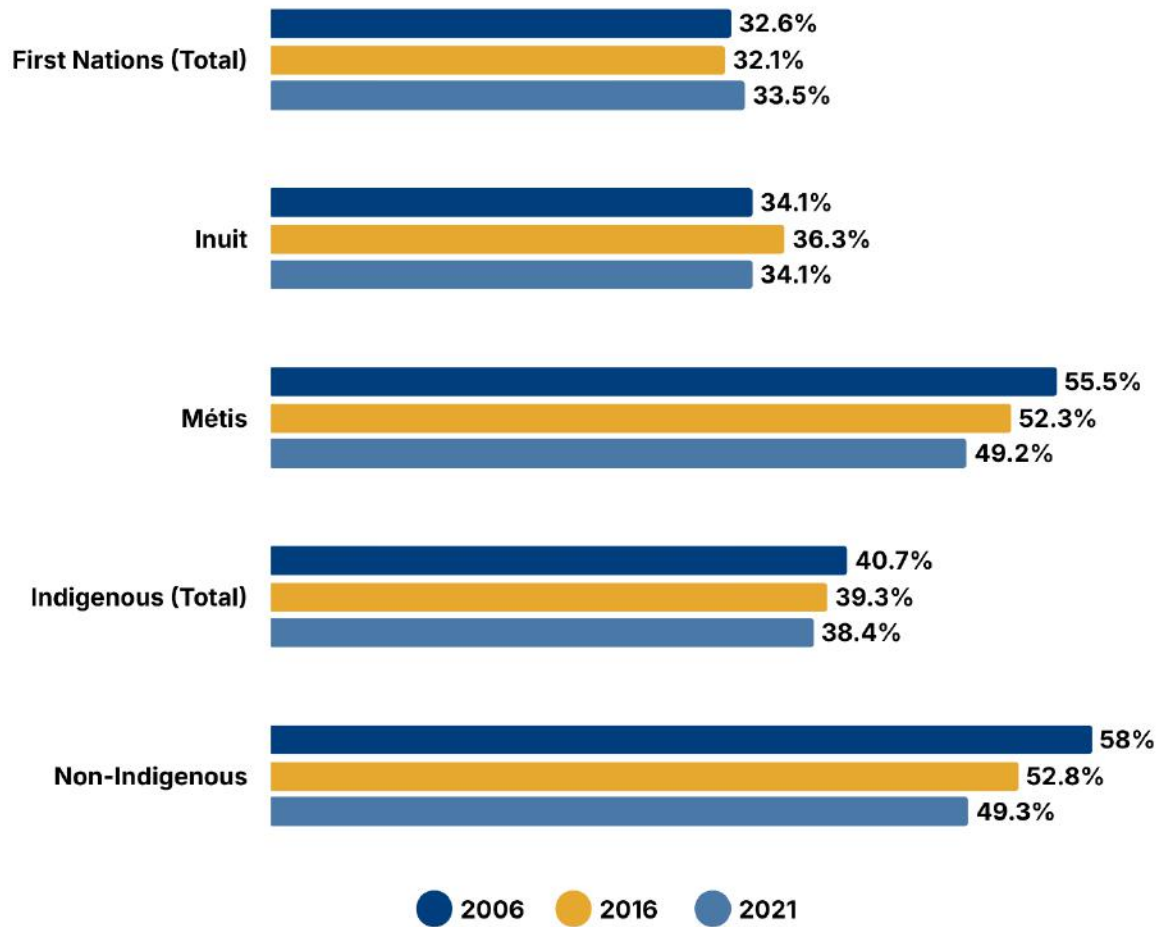
<sup>235</sup> The Conference Board of Canada. (2024). *Indigenous Ownership*.

<sup>236</sup> Indigenous Institutes Consortium. (2020). *Programs & Services : A Comparative Analysis*.

two groups in the unemployment rate is 1.6 percentage points, with rates of 20.9% for Métis youth and 19.3% for non-Indigenous youth (Figure 98).

**Figure 98: Employment Rate of Youth (15 to 24 years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021, Canada**

## Employment Rate of Youth (15 to 24 Years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and Census 2021

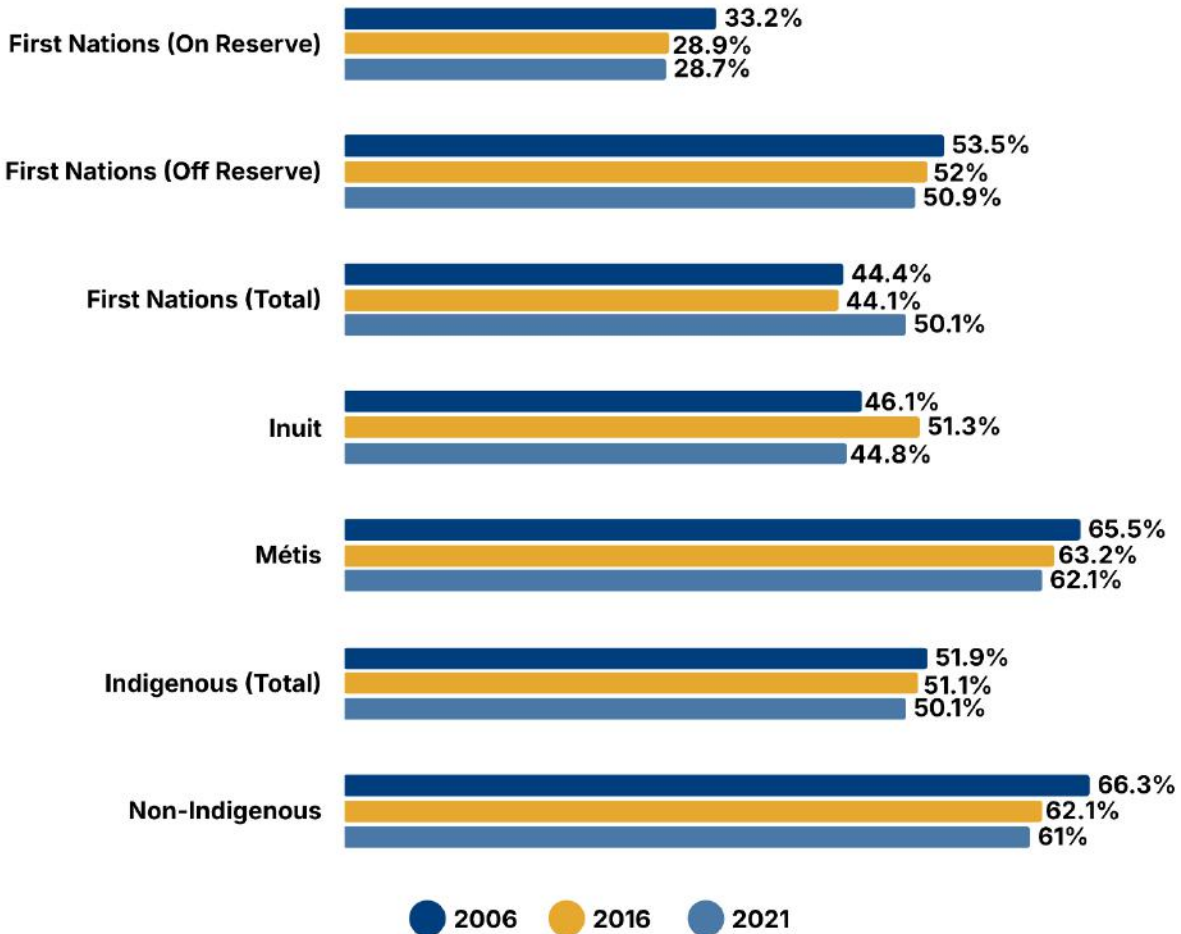
Employment outcomes for First Nation youth on reserve remained consistent or improved since 2016. Comparatively, employment outcomes for non-Indigenous youth and other Indigenous identity groups mostly worsened between 2016 and 2021. The labour force participation rate of First Nation youth on reserve decreased from 28.9% in 2016 to 28.7% in 2021, compared to a decrease from 62.1% to 61.0% among non-Indigenous youth. During the period of 2016 to 2021, their unemployment rate decreased from 40.8% to 27.6%, a decrease of 13.2 percentage points. Contrastingly, the unemployment rate of non-Indigenous youth increased from 15.1% to 19.3%.

The gap in labour force participation rates between First Nation off-reserve youth and non-Indigenous youth remained consistent since 2016 at 10.1 percentage points (Figure 99). Simultaneously, the unemployment rate of First Nation youth off reserve increased at a lesser rate than that of non-Indigenous

youth with an increase of 0.9 percentage points for First Nation youth off reserve and 4.2 percentage points for non-Indigenous youth.

**Figure 99: Labour Force Participation Rate of Youth (15 to 24 Years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021, Canada**

## Labour Force Participation Rate of Youth (15 to 24 Years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and Census 2021

Inuit youth have continued to progress towards closing the gap with non-Indigenous youth with regard to the employment rate, but this is primarily due to a decrease in the non-Indigenous youth employment rate rather than an increase among Inuit youth. That being said, Inuit youth experienced a smaller decrease than non-Indigenous youth since 2016, specifically from 36.3% in 2016 to 34.1% in 2021 compared to 52.8% in 2016 to 49.3% in 2021 among non-Indigenous youth. However, the labour force participation rate of Inuit youth decreased substantially compared to non-Indigenous youth, effectively widening the gap between the two populations from 10.8 percentage points in 2016 to 16.2 percentage points in 2021. Contrastingly, the unemployment rate of Inuit youth decreased between 2016 to 2021 from 29.4% to 23.8% while the unemployment rate of non-Indigenous youth increased from 15.1% to

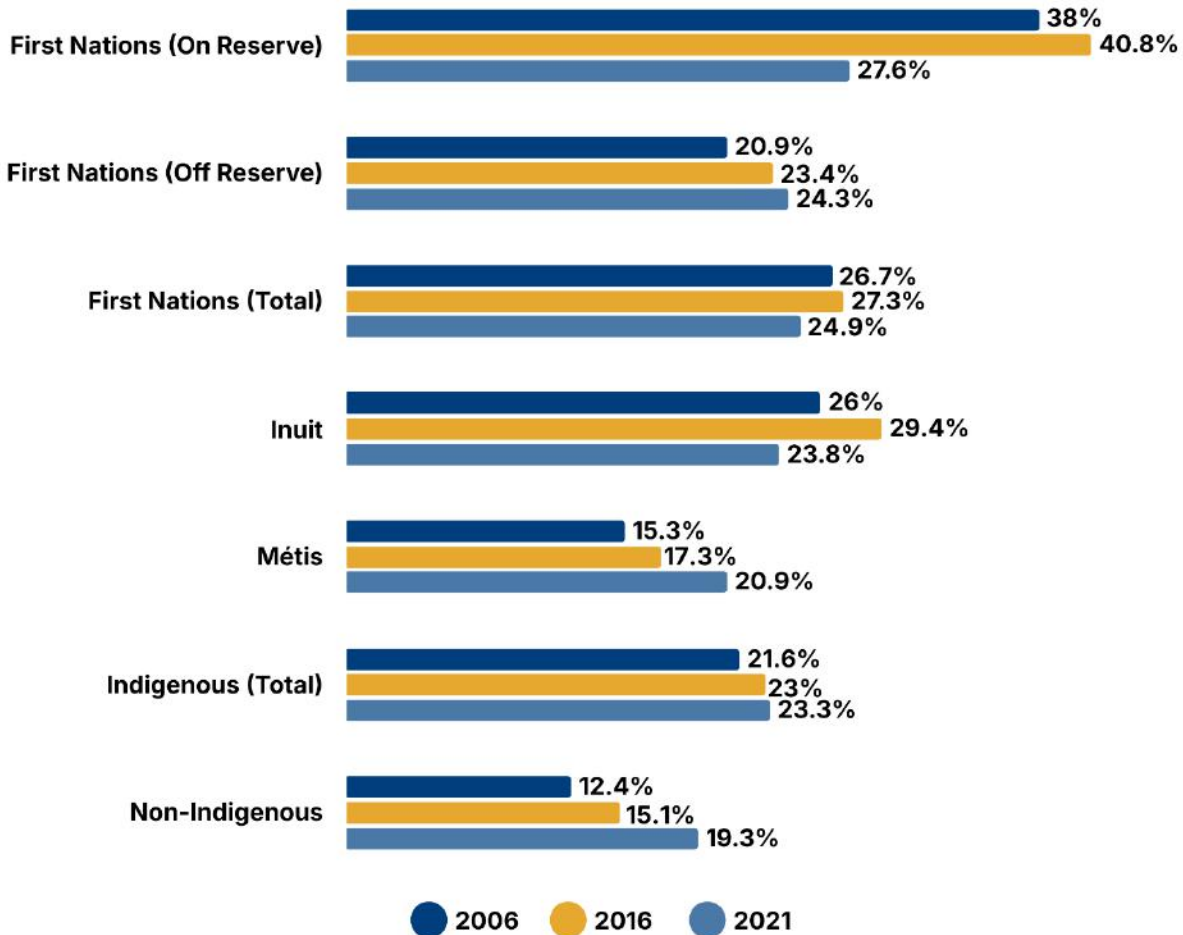
19.3%. These changes narrowed the gap from 14.3 percentage points in 2016 to 4.5 percentage points in 2021.

As identified in the 2019 *IEPR*, the employment rate of youth was lower than the rate of the total population (age 15+) for Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in 2021. The gap between youth and the total population's employment rate was wider for the Indigenous population than for the non-Indigenous population at 12.1 percentage points and 8.1 percentage points, respectively. This indicates that Indigenous youth face more barriers in employment than the Indigenous adult population and the non-Indigenous youth population.

As was the case in 2016, the unemployment rate is highest for First Nation youth on reserve at 27.6%. This rate is almost double the unemployment rate of non-Indigenous youth, but has improved since the last Census, as the rate was almost triple that of non-Indigenous youth in 2016. While there has been improvement, this indicates that barriers to employment have persisted for First Nation youth on reserve (Figure 100).

Figure 100: Unemployment Rate (15 to 24 Years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021, Canada

## Unemployment Rate of Youth (15 to 24 Years) by Identity Group, 2006, 2016 and 2021



Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 9A, INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 6.05 and Census 2021

Indigenous youth, aged 15-24 years, are most frequently employed in the retail trade industry, followed by the accommodation and food services and healthcare and social assistance industries. The retail trade industry has the highest employment numbers for all identity groups, except for First Nation youth on reserve. First Nation youth on reserve are most frequently employed in public administration.

The occupation categories in which Indigenous youth have the highest employment numbers include legislative and senior management occupations, natural and applied sciences and related occupations, and trades, transport, equipment operation, and related occupations. Inuit youth and First Nation youth on and off reserve most frequently hold positions in natural and applied sciences and related occupations. Métis youth have the highest employment rates in trades, transport, equipment operation and related occupations.

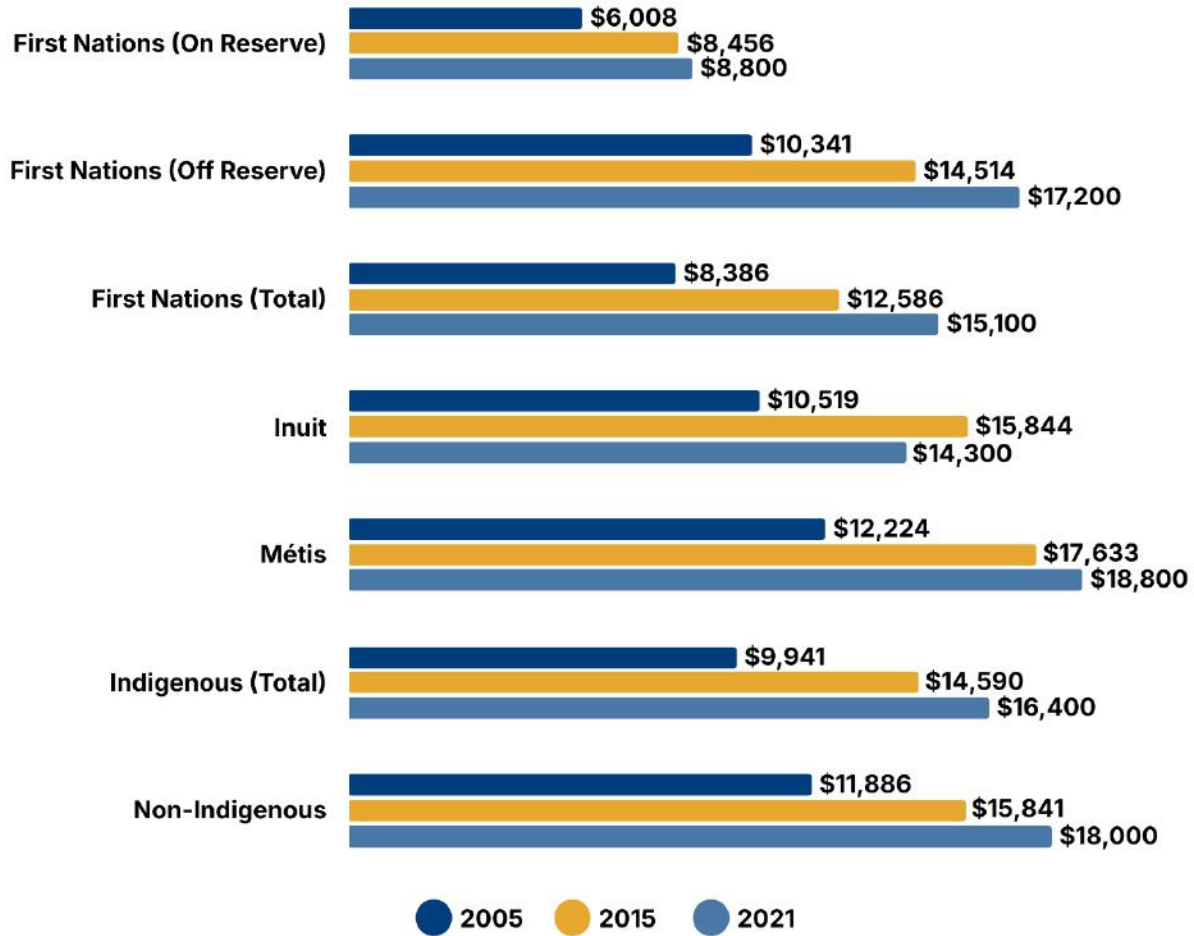


## Youth Income

The income gap between the Indigenous youth population aged 15 to 24 years and non-Indigenous youth has remained relatively consistent since 2015. In 2021, the gap in median income was 8.9 percentage points, compared to 7.9 percentage points in 2015. Youth in all Indigenous identity groups, except for Inuit, experienced an increase in median income. Most notably, the median income of First Nation off reserve youth increased from \$14,514 in 2015 to \$17,200 in 2021. The gap between First Nation youth off reserve and non-Indigenous youth also decreased from 8.4 percentage points in 2015 to 4.4 percentage points in 2021. However, Inuit youth saw a decrease in their median income, from \$15,844 in 2015 to \$14,300 in 2021. These increases and decrease resulted in the small change in the gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth populations. First Nation youth on reserve have the largest gap with non-Indigenous youth and it increased from 46.6 percentage points in 2015 to 51.1 percentage points in 2021. Métis youth continue to outpace non-Indigenous youth in median income, but the gap has lessened since 2015 from 10.2% to 4.3% in 2021 (Figure 101).

Figure 101: Youth (15 Years and Older) Median Income by Identity Group, 2005, 2015 and 2021, Canada

## Youth (15 to 24 Years) Median Income by Identity Group, 2005, 2015 and 2021



Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population<sup>237</sup>

- In 2021, Indigenous youth showed varying levels of progress in their employment outcomes (employment rate, labour participation rate, and unemployment rate) compared to non-Indigenous youth.
- First Nation youth on reserve experienced the largest decrease in the unemployment rate since 2016, while other outcomes were consistent with the 2016 levels.
- Inuit youth are making progress in that their unemployment rate has decreased.
- Median income levels for Indigenous youth are improving across all identity groups from 2015, except for Inuit youth.

<sup>237</sup> 2005 and 2015 taken from 2019 IEPR, ANNEX A: TABLES, CORE INDICATOR #2: INCOME. Sources: INAC's 2006 Census Core Table 10 and INAC's 2016 Census Core Table 5.04

## Support for Indigenous Youth Economic Engagement

The 2019 *IEPR* outlined three recommendations related to youth economic engagement: promote Indigenous entrepreneurship amongst youth, create urban Indigenous healing and employment hubs and an alumni fund, and include community considerations and perspectives in youth program development.

Notable program advancements have been made by the Government of Canada since the 2019 report. First, the Government of Canada launched a 5-year Indigenous youth-led pilot program in partnership with Canadian Roots Exchange to advance reconciliation, self-determination, co-development, and to strengthen and rebuild the Crown-Indigenous relationship with Indigenous youth. The pilot program has begun to establish strong pathways for Indigenous youth from across Canada to come together, support each other, and engage with federal departments on key policy initiatives impacting them and their communities.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) hosts the Youth Employment and Skills Program (YESP), which funds employment opportunities for youth in the agriculture and agri-food sector to help them increase their work experience, learn new skills, and improve their employability in the sector. AAFC has prioritized youth facing systemic barriers, including Indigenous youth.

Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) Youth Employment Skills Strategy (YESS) supports entrepreneurial skills by enabling youth to develop skills that equip them to establish an enterprise and become capable businesspeople. YESS targets its support towards under-represented youth, including Indigenous youth, and includes culturally specific supports and services. The YESS Call for Proposals includes activities designed to help support youth entrepreneurs gain self-employment as an eligible expense under the program, as well as to provide mentoring and coaching as eligible program expenses. The 2018 YESS Call for Proposals included culturally appropriate Indigenous supports, such as access to networks of Indigenous social services, as an eligible expense under the program. Additionally, the 2019 YESS Call for Proposals provided funding to several Indigenous-led family and community groups, including Native Friendship Centres, nations' Indigenous organizations, tribal councils, individual First Nations, Indigenous community councils, and non-profits serving urban-Indigenous youth.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also providing support for Indigenous youth engaging in entrepreneurship and economic development, including Futurpreneur and Cando. Futurpreneur, a national non-profit organization, provides financing, mentoring, and support tools to aspiring business owners between the ages of 18 and 39.<sup>238</sup> Futurpreneur offers an Indigenous Entrepreneur Startup Program, which provides financing, mentorship for up to two years, and access to resources to support young entrepreneurs.<sup>239</sup>

Cando is a national non-profit organization focused on training, educating, and providing networking opportunities to Economic Development Officers to enable them to serve their communities and organizations.<sup>240</sup> Cando organizes various events focused on engaging youth in economic development,

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<sup>238</sup> Futurpreneur. (2024). *About us*.

<sup>239</sup> Futurpreneur. (2024). *Indigenous Entrepreneur Startup Program*.

<sup>240</sup> Cando. (2024). *About Cando*.

including the Cando Economic Development Youth Summit, Cando Youth Connect, and the National Youth Panel.<sup>241</sup>

- The Government of Canada has made advancements in its Indigenous youth programming since 2016. Programs like YESP and YESS support Indigenous youth in the development of critical skills to enter the labour market and pursue entrepreneurship.
- Non-profit organizations like Futurpreneur and Cando are providing support and opportunities to Indigenous youth to help them build businesses and contribute to economic development in their communities and organizations.

## Conclusion

The Indigenous population is young and growing, offering an opportunity to utilize the economic potential of Indigenous youth to fill the anticipated labour shortage. In response to this, focus must be placed on improving educational and employment outcomes for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit youth.

Many barriers to educational attainment and labour market participation persist for First Nation, Inuit, and Métis youth. While advancements in university completion rates and employment indicators point towards progress, many systemic issues limit Indigenous youth's ability to achieve economic parity with non-Indigenous youth. Focusing solely on educational and employment opportunities for youth can place pressure on the youth and their communities to improve their outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to also focus on the necessary systemic change.

This chapter points to advancements in university completion among Indigenous identity groups, with the number of university graduates continuously increasing since 2011 according to the Deloitte Future of Canada Centre. Indigenous youth have spoken to the ways in which university empowers them to make a positive impact. Congruently, post-secondary institutions are continuing to introduce and improve Indigenous curricula and programming, some in partnership with Indigenous communities. Additionally, the number of Indigenous institutions is increasing, providing an opportunity for education grounded in Indigenous languages, pedagogies, cultures, and worldviews. These institutions hold immense potential in providing long-term economic benefits for Indigenous communities.

While the employment rate, labour force participation rate, and unemployment rate of Indigenous youth continue to be below those of non-Indigenous youth, slow improvements are being noted. For Métis youth, the gaps in employment indicators that have historically existed with non-Indigenous youth are narrowing, bringing Métis indicators approximately equal to or just slightly below those of non-Indigenous youth.

As was noted in the 2019 *IEPR*, Indigenous youth continue to face more barriers in employment than the total Indigenous population and the non-Indigenous youth population, as indicated by a lower employment rate.

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<sup>241</sup> Cando. (2024). *Youth*.

When looking at Indigenous youth's income, the gap with non-Indigenous youth has remained relatively consistent since 2016. First Nations, both on and off reserve, and Métis youth experienced an increase in median income, but the same was not experienced by Inuit youth, who saw a decrease.

Lastly, the Government of Canada and its various departments have made advancements in their programs targeting Indigenous youth. These programs have focused on policy development, employment opportunities, and entrepreneurship. Furthermore, NGOs like Futurpreneur and Cando are providing training and mentorship to Indigenous youth to encourage them to get involved in entrepreneurship and economic development in their communities.

#### 2019 IEPR Recommendation requiring additional attention

- ***Entrepreneurship should be promoted and supported as a valid career option for youth.***
- ***Government creates urban Indigenous healing and employment hubs; invest in basic education infrastructure; develop distance education training; create an alumni fund to enable mentorship; and invest in Indigenous scholarship funding to support post-secondary education.***
- ***Include family and community considerations and perspectives in youth program development.***

#### 2024 IEPR Recommendations Related to youth

- ***Implement alternative, Indigenous-led, youth employment partnerships in colleges and trade schools, beyond what Federal Government has now, and beyond Band employment.***
- ***Focus on systemic change to improve outcomes for youth.***

## Regional Analysis

Examining only nation-wide data on employment and income indicators can obscure region specific gaps. While location is a fact that cannot be changed, understanding where the biggest gaps exist can help direct investments and policy changes to where it is needed most. Therefore, this chapter provides a more specific regional analysis of the Indigenous population and the three main Indigenous groups in Canada (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis). This chapter does this by analyzing income and employment data at the provincial and territorial level, specifically average income, median income, employment rate, unemployment rate, and labour force participation rate. Moreover, staying consistent with the previous *IEPRs*, the data is compared between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations to get a sense of where gaps persist (if any). The goal is for Indigenous Peoples and their respective Indigenous groups to achieve economic parity with the rest of Canada.

## Income

This section examines the breakdown of average income and median income across the various provinces and territories in Canada by Indigenous identity. Under each column for the respective Indigenous identity, the province or territory with the highest income earned is bolded.

For average income (Table 6), Yukon has the highest for all Indigenous Peoples, while Nunavut has the highest for First Nation, Métis, and non-Indigenous peoples. Interestingly, Alberta has the highest average income for Inuit.

Nunavut of all provinces and territories has the highest gap in average income between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Non-Indigenous peoples in Nunavut earn \$60,420 more in average income compared to Indigenous Peoples. Contrastingly, Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest gap in average income between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Non-Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador earned only \$3,520 more in average income compared to Indigenous Peoples.

**Table 6: Average Income (\$) by Provinces, Territories and Indigenous Identity**

Geography	Indigenous	First Nations	Inuit	Métis	Non-Indigenous	Gap
Alberta	48960	44280	<b>53200</b>	53700	61600	-12640
British Columbia	43840	40840	40800	49040	55000	-11160
Canada	44920	41880	45640	49400	54900	-9980
Manitoba	38960	32320	44600	46840	51120	-12160
New Brunswick	39840	39040	40000	41520	46160	-6320
Newfoundland and Labrador	45240	43920	48480	50000	48760	-3520
Northwest Territories	53400	50200	49480	71900	83800	-30400

Nova Scotia	41360	38520	42100	44800	47800	-6440
Nunavut	46080	<b>88000</b>	45320	<b>112000</b>	<b>106500</b>	<b>-60420</b>
Ontario	48200	46960	43920	50360	56600	-8400
Prince Edward Island	41200	38640	36500	48800	46240	-5040
Quebec	44600	44080	44000	45280	51350	-6750
Saskatchewan	40720	35600	43600	48800	55050	-14330
Yukon	<b>55200</b>	52900	47200	66000	66500	-11300

Source: ISC Custom Tabulation (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population

For median income (Table 7), Indigenous Peoples earn the highest median income in Yukon compared to all provinces and territories, at \$45,200. Indigenous Peoples earn the lowest median income in Manitoba, at \$31,400. First Nation Peoples earn the highest median income in Nunavut, at \$69,000, whereas First Nation Peoples earn the lowest median income in Manitoba, at \$26,000. Inuit earn the highest median income in the Yukon at \$44,000, whereas they earn the lowest median income in New Brunswick at \$29,800. Métis Peoples earn the highest median income in Nunavut at \$121,000 and earn the lowest in New Brunswick at \$35,200.

Nunavut of all provinces and territories also had the highest gap in median income between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. As such, non-Indigenous peoples earned \$79,200 more in median income compared to Indigenous Peoples in Nunavut. Newfoundland and Labrador had the lowest gap in median income between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, where non-Indigenous peoples earned only \$800 more in median income compared to Indigenous Peoples.

**Table 7: Median Income (\$) by Provinces, Territories and Identity**

Geography	Indigenous	First Nations	Inuk (Inuit)	Métis	Non-Indigenous	Gap
Alberta	36800	33200	34800	40800	45200	-8400
British Columbia	34800	32400	34000	39200	41200	-6400
Canada	34800	32400	33200	39200	41200	-6400
Manitoba	31400	26000	33200	38400	40800	-9400
New Brunswick	33200	32000	29800	35200	38000	-4800
Newfoundland and Labrador	36000	35200	38000	39200	36800	-800
Northwest Territories	39200	36800	36000	57600	76500	-37300
Nova Scotia	34000	32000	33600	36400	38000	-4000
Nunavut	30800	<b>69000</b>	30400	<b>121000</b>	<b>110000</b>	<b>-79200</b>
Ontario	36000	33600	32400	40000	41200	-5200
Prince Edward Island	35200	33200	38400	44400	38800	-3600
Quebec	37200	37200	34800	38000	40800	-3600
Saskatchewan	32000	28200	33600	39200	44400	-12400

Source: ISC Custom Tabulations (NIEDB\_5C), 2021 Census of Population

## Employment

This section examines the breakdown of employment indicators (employment rate, unemployment rate, and labour force participation rate) across the various provinces and territories in Canada by Indigenous identity. Under each column for the respective Indigenous identity, the province or territory with the best outcome for that employment indicator is bolded. For a strong performing labour force in the economy, the goal is generally a high employment rate, a low unemployment rate, and a high labour force participation rate.

For employment rate (Table 8), Indigenous Peoples are employed at a much higher rate in Prince Edward Island and employed at the lowest rate in Saskatchewan, at 57.8% and 43.9%, respectively. First Nation Peoples were employed at the highest rate in Nunavut and employed at the lowest rate in Saskatchewan, at 73.3% and 35.5%, respectively. Inuit were employed at the highest rate in Prince Edward Island and employed at the lowest rate in Nunavut, at 61.5% and 40.3%, respectively. The Métis were employed at the highest rate in Nunavut and employed at the lowest rate in New Brunswick, at 90.9% and 50.2%, respectively.

Nunavut had the highest employment rate for First Nation, Métis, and non-Indigenous peoples, likely because of the small population from these respective groups in the territory. As a result, this may not be an accurate comparison to other regions where the populations of each group are greater, and experiences are much different.

Nunavut had the highest gap in the employment rate between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples at 43.8%. This is not a surprise as many non-Indigenous peoples located in Nunavut generally move/live there for work purposes. The Northwest Territories has the second highest gap, likely due to similar reasons. Among the provinces, the employment rate gap is highest in the prairies, with Saskatchewan and Manitoba having the biggest gaps, at 18.7% and 13.8%, respectively.

**Table 8: Employment Rate by Provinces, Territories and Identity**

Geography	Indigenous	First Nations	Inuit	Métis	Non-Indigenous	Gap
Alberta	50.8	43.9	53.4	58.1	60.8	-10
British Columbia	54.5	51.2	54.6	60.4	58.1	-3.6
Manitoba	47.4	37.3	51.4	59.6	61.2	-13.8
New Brunswick	49.1	49.1	42.1	50.2	54.1	-5
Newfoundland and Labrador	47.6	47.5	48.6	50.7	47.5	<b>0.1</b>
Northwest Territories	50.1	47.4	48.2	64.8	77.5	-27.4
Nova Scotia	49.9	47.4	54	53.1	52	-2.1
Nunavut	40.8	<b>73.3</b>	40.3	<b>90.9</b>	<b>84.6</b>	-43.8
Ontario	50.9	48.7	49.4	55	55.2	-4.3



Prince Edward Island	<b>57.8</b>	55	<b>61.5</b>	63.8	59	-1.2
Quebec	54	53	52	56.6	59.4	-5.4
Saskatchewan	43.9	35.5	48.5	58.4	62.6	-18.7
Yukon	55.6	53.8	50	63.5	69.8	-14.2
Canada	50.5	46.3	46.4	57.5	57.4	-6.9

Source: ISC Custom Tabulations, 2021 Census of Population.

For the labour force participation rate (Table 9), Prince Edward Island had the highest labour force participation rate amongst Indigenous Peoples and Inuit, at a rate of 66.9% and 73.1%, respectively. Nunavut had the highest labour force participation for the Métis and non-Indigenous peoples, at a rate of 95.5% and 87.5%, respectively. This is likely because most Métis and non-Indigenous peoples move to or live in Nunavut for work purposes. Yukon had the highest labour force participation rate for First Nation Peoples at 63.9%.

Additionally, Nunavut had the lowest labour force participation for Indigenous Peoples and Inuit at a rate of 52.3% and 51.9%, respectively. Saskatchewan and Manitoba had the lowest labour force participation amongst First Nation Peoples at a rate of 46.6% and 46.7%, respectively. New Brunswick had the lowest labour force participation amongst the Métis at a rate of 55.8%.

Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island had the best outcomes in the labour force participation gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, where Indigenous Peoples in both provinces outperformed non-Indigenous peoples in the measure. On the other hand, Nunavut performed the worst and had the highest labour force participation gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. As mentioned previously, this is largely because of non-Indigenous peoples moving to or living in Nunavut for work purposes.

**Table 9: Labour Force Participation Rate by Provinces, Territories and Identity (%)**

Geography	Indigenous	First Nations	Inuit	Métis	Non-Indigenous	Gap
Alberta	62.4	56.1	66	69	68.4	-6
British Columbia	62.2	59.2	62.5	67.6	63.3	-1.1
Manitoba	55.8	46.7	62.6	66.9	66	-10.2
New Brunswick	58.7	59.1	48.4	59.9	60.1	-1.4
Newfoundland and Labrador	59.2	58.7	58.6	65.7	55.8	<b>3.4</b>
Northwest Territories	59.1	57	57.4	71.1	81.1	-22
Nova Scotia	59.4	57.3	62.6	62.2	59.5	-0.1
Nunavut	52.3	73.3	51.9	<b>95.5</b>	<b>87.5</b>	-35.2
Ontario	59.9	57.9	62.2	63.5	62.9	-3
Prince Edward Island	<b>66.9</b>	63.6	<b>73.1</b>	74.6	65.8	1.1

Quebec	60	58.6	59.3	63.2	64.2	-4.2
Saskatchewan	54	46.6	58.8	66.9	67.4	-13.4
Yukon	64.7	<b>63.9</b>	63.9	68.5	73.6	-8.9
Canada	59.5	55.6	56.6	66	63.9	-4.4

Source: ISC Custom Tabulations, 2021 Census of Population.

For the unemployment rate (Table 10), both Indigenous and First Nation Peoples in Quebec performed the best of all provinces and territories, having the lowest rate at 10%. Inuit performed the best in the province of New Brunswick by having the lowest unemployment rate at 9.6%. The Métis performed the best in the Northwest Territories by having the lowest unemployment rate at 9%.

The disparity in unemployment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples was least pronounced in Quebec, having an unemployment rate gap of 2.5 percentage points. Comparatively, the disparity in unemployment was highest in Nunavut, having an unemployment rate gap of 10.8 percentage points. Moreover, amongst the provinces, the gap was highest in Saskatchewan at 11.7 percentage points.

**Table 10: Unemployment Rate by Provinces, Territories and Identity**

Geography	Indigenous	First Nations	Inuit	Métis	Non-Indigenous	Gap
Alberta	18.5	21.7	18.7	15.8	11.1	7.4
British Columbia	12.4	13.5	13.4	10.6	8.2	4.2
Manitoba	15.1	20.1	19.4	10.8	7.2	7.9
New Brunswick	16.5	16.9	<b>10.9</b>	16.2	10.1	6.4
Newfoundland and Labrador	19.7	19	17.1	22.9	14.8	4.9
Northwest Territories	15.2	16.7	16.3	<b>9</b>	4.4	10.8
Nova Scotia	16	17.4	13.7	14.5	12.6	3.4
Nunavut	22	0	22.3	0	<b>3.1</b>	18.9
Ontario	15	15.9	20.8	13.3	12.2	2.8
Prince Edward Island	13.9	13.5	15.8	14.4	10.3	3.6
Quebec	<b>10</b>	<b>9.6</b>	12.3	10.3	7.5	<b>2.5</b>
Saskatchewan	18.7	23.6	17.5	12.7	7	11.7
Yukon	14	15.8	21.7	6.5	5.2	8.8
Canada	15.1	16.7	18.1	12.8	10.1	5

Source: ISC Custom Tabulations, 2021 Census of Population.

- Indigenous Peoples experience negative gaps in both average and median incomes compared to non-Indigenous peoples across all provinces and territories, with not even one province or territory representing a level-playing field.
- Gaps in employment (employment rate, unemployment rate, and labour force participation rate) persist across all provinces and territories, with most showing a gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples across all employment indicators.
- There is some promise when considering both employment and labour force participation rates, as Indigenous peoples outperform non-Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## The 2024 Recommendations For Progress

In light of the extensive analysis and comprehensive review of Indigenous economic development initiatives contained within this report, a set of recommendations and considerations aimed at fostering sustainable growth and prosperity within Indigenous communities have been formulated. These recommendations are designed to empower Indigenous peoples, promote self-determination, and create opportunities for economic advancement. The recommendations put forward are related to the “Core and Underlying” indicators found within the report.

By implementing the 70 core recommendations contained within this report, along with the 22 strategic considerations, in a collaborative and culturally sensitive manner, support can be given towards the economic empowerment and self-determination of Indigenous peoples, paving the way for sustainable development and prosperity for generations to come.

The recommendations shall be applied using the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples distinct recognition of the unique rights, cultures, and histories of different Indigenous groups – First Nations, Métis, Inuit. Also of note is the growing urban First Nation population and have tracked this specific dataset separately. Using a distinctions-based approach in the implementation of these recommendations will ensure that approaches and policies are tailored to each group’s context and acknowledges diverse legal systems, governance, and land rights.

Complimentary to the work outlined within this report, the National Indigenous Economic Strategy (NIES) (2022) was developed by more than 20 national Indigenous economic organizations, including the NIEDB, to guide all levels of government, Indigenous entities and communities, small and medium-sized enterprises, and non-Indigenous organizations and institutions. The NIES is an Indigenous-led strategy, built upon four Strategic Pathways (People, Land, Infrastructure and Finance), and includes specific “Calls to Economic Prosperity” that can be supported by all Canadians, governments, businesses, and institutions to realize economic parity for all Indigenous Peoples. The Strategy also provides Indigenous economic development practitioners and policy makers with a coherent vision designed to guide efforts in the coming decade.

In addition, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (referred to as UNDA) represents a significant piece of Canadian legislation aimed at upholding the rights of Indigenous peoples. Economic reconciliation within the context of UNDA involves addressing historical injustices and disparities faced by Indigenous communities in economic matters. This includes ensuring Indigenous peoples have equal access to economic opportunities, resources, and benefits, as well as the recognition and protection of their rights to land, territories, and natural resources.

Lastly, the 2019 Indigenous Economic Progress Report (IEPR) also made important recommendations supporting the Indigenous economy, using a multi-faceted approach to address systemic barriers impacting Indigenous peoples in Canada. In 2022, federal departments and agencies were asked by the NIEDB to review the recommendations in the 2019 Indigenous Economic Progress Report, and to report on any actions which may have served to advance specific recommendations since the report was issued. The NIEDB was pleased with the breadth and scope of the responses received, however there is still much work to be done. For this reason, the NIEDB is highlighting 2019 recommendations which still require attention.

By using the NIES, UNDA, and previous iterations of the Indigenous Economic Progress Report as a foundation for the recommendations below, governments and organizations can work towards addressing historical injustices, promoting Indigenous self-determination, and fostering sustainable economic development while not discounting the pivotal work that has already been done in these areas.

The NIEDB also recognizes that there are distinct roles to play for various social actors in terms of ensuring the economic success of Indigenous peoples in Canada, including a role for governments, Indigenous communities, private sector, civil society and beyond. Identifying the social actors responsible for implementing these recommendations will ensure accountability and provide a clear path forward for each sector.

## 1. Core Indicator Number 1: Employment

### Understanding the Barriers to Employment

To appreciate the importance of the recommendations related to Indigenous employment, it is crucial to understand some of the barriers Indigenous Peoples face in the labour market:

 <p><b>Decreased Desirability and Competitiveness of On-Reserve Employment</b></p> <p>On-reserve tax regimes lowering pay and effecting pension plans; poorer medical benefits and pension services; and a lack of support funding enabling businesses to be competitive.</p>	 <p><b>Rural Location</b></p> <p>Less employment opportunities in rural areas than in urban areas.</p>	 <p><b>Increased Vulnerability to Job Market Fluctuations</b></p> <p>COVID-19 significantly and disproportionality affected the employment and labour force participation rates of Indigenous Peoples which may point to an increased vulnerability to job market fluctuations.</p>	 <p><b>Lack of Transportation</b></p> <p>Without reliable transportation, individuals residing in rural or remote areas may struggle to reach job opportunities that are often located far from their communities.</p>
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#### Recommendations:

- 1.1 Establish job placement and career advancement services and organizations, specifically for Indigenous job seekers. This includes career counseling, resume building, and interview preparation to help individuals secure well-paying jobs as well as continuous mentorship, training, and professional development opportunities to help maintain and progress in these roles.

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 22)*<sup>242</sup>

The labour force participation rate continues to be lowest for First Nations on reserve, with the 2021 Census demonstrating an increasing gap (from 17.1 percentage points in

<sup>242</sup> In order to recognize the efforts, put forward in this area previously, the NIEDB has ensured to link recommendations from other reports such as the National Indigenous Economic Strategy (NIES) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA). By linking these recommendations, organizations can streamline their strategies, identify common themes, and leverage existing insights efficiently.

2016 to 18.3 percentage points in 2021) with non-Indigenous rates. In addition, during the pandemic period, three industries accounted for 80 per cent of job losses in Canada: hospitality; information, culture and recreation; and retail trade. In the 2016 and 2021 census, racialized people were over-represented in these sectors and therefore experienced more labour impacts. Given this, Indigenous peoples were more likely to be seeking new positions following labour shortages and may have found increased success with participation in the labour force if they possessed the foundational skills to effectively build resumes and prepare for interviews and other typical job-seeking activities.

Indigenous-specific services in this area will help recognize the unique barriers and challenges that Indigenous peoples face in the labour force and help capitalize on strengths and aspirations that will help guide them towards suitable and effective career paths and ensure that they may progress within these roles with effective mentorship and training.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Civil society, Indigenous community members, federal/provincial/territorial/Indigenous governments, private sector employers, unions, and labour boards.**

**1.2** [Increase Indigenous employment in federal, provincial, and municipal government roles by setting targets and creating dedicated pathways for Indigenous Peoples to enter and advance in the public service. Report progress on new hires and retention annually.](#)

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 51 and UNDA Articles 3, 5, 32)*

This recommendation reflects the shift towards Indigenous-led solutions that underscore the importance of having Indigenous voices represented in all levels of government at decision-making tables, particularly in the economic development phase. Fostering the inclusion of First Nations, Inuit, Métis and rural and urban Indigenous voices at policy tables ensures that their unique and distinct perspectives are taken into consideration and recognition is given to the fact that Indigenous peoples are best placed to make decisions that impact their communities.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private sector organizations, Indigenous communities, and civil society.**

**1.3** [Ensure employment opportunities for Indigenous individuals, including those on reserve and in rural and remote areas have competitive salaries, wages, and benefits comparable with employment opportunities offered to non-Indigenous individuals and off-reserve occupations.](#)

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 22 and UNDA Articles 3, 5, 21)*

The median income of First Nations on reserve is \$26,200, the lowest of all identity groups. Lack of sufficient levels of revenue by public and private sector employers on-reserve and the taxation regime on-reserve result in First Nations receiving lower pay for on-reserve jobs. The taxation regime impacts pensions by lowering one's overall salary. As First Nations gain more jurisdictional control, income and pensions must be competitive to ensure community members are not disadvantaged when working on reserve.

To comply with this recommendation, laws and employment standards that ensure competitive salaries, wages, and benefits are offered to Indigenous employees and implemented on-reserve must be enacted and enforced. Actors responsible for implementing this recommendation have a responsibility to uphold the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples through targeted employment policies, affirmative action programs, and regulations that ensure fair compensation.

A commitment to fair labor practices and competitive compensation packages is crucial to foster inclusivity and competitiveness in compensation through corporate policies that specifically address wage parity, including special initiatives for Indigenous employees.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Civil society, Indigenous community members, federal/provincial/territorial/Indigenous governments, private sector employers, unions, and labour boards.**

1.4

**Provide equitable incentives for businesses to hire, train, and retain Indigenous Peoples in the workforce. This could include tax breaks, subsidies, and grants for businesses that employ Indigenous Peoples and invest in their career development. (Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 22 and UNDA Article 21(2))**

In today's workforce, there is an increased focus on diversity and inclusion of employees within organizations. As a result, Indigenous employees are highly sought after at every level. On-reserve employers and Indigenous organizations tend to take the brunt of workforce preparation and hiring entry-level Indigenous employees for training, to later see them advance to larger corporations or government entities who can offer more competitive salary and benefits packages.

It must be recognized that Indigenous organizations have spent ample time and resources training employees and providing them with the necessary experience to be productive and successful members of the labor force. Supportive measures to compensate these organizations for their groundwork must be implemented. Indigenous organizations often cannot compete with larger corporations or the federal government due to their lack of resources and capacity to implement more competitive salary or benefits packages.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal government, Indigenous organizations, and private sector organizations.**

- 1.5** Provide funding for Indigenous organizations to be able to effectively anticipate and adapt to future labour market challenges such as advancements in the technological field and environmental issues and unanticipated events (e.g., pandemic). This may be through the development of workplans aligned with local economic needs or through training related to emerging technology and other unforeseen events.

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 20 and UNDA Article 21)*

As evidenced throughout this report, the impacts of the pandemic on Indigenous communities in the economic space have been profound and have highlighted existing disparities and challenges faced by Indigenous communities in terms of employment and economic resilience.

In addition, innovations such as increased automation in the workforce is reshaping the nature of work and employment relationships. While it brings opportunities for increased efficiency and productivity, it also presents challenges in terms of job displacement and income inequality that need to be addressed through proactive policy responses and investments in human capital development. Developing comprehensive workplans that account for the unique circumstances and local economic needs of each community will be paramount to ensure that communities may overcome challenges and adapt to changing environments.

In addition, providing support for training related to emerging technology and digital infrastructure as well as climate change adaptation and disaster preparedness will assist organizations to better navigate future labour market challenges and create sustainable communities. Addressing these issues requires collaborative efforts between pillars of society to ensure that recovery efforts are inclusive, equitable, and culturally sensitive.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/territorial/Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, Indigenous communities, unions, private sector employers, and civil society.**

- 1.6** Establish and enhance job creation programs with increased funding for trades, apprenticeships, and certifications that are tailored to Indigenous Peoples and focus on sectors where there is a high demand for workers, skilled labourers and opportunities for sustainable growth (e.g.: green energy, technology, resource development, and healthcare).

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 2, 23, 24 and UNDA Articles 21, 21(2), 22)*

The college/trades completion rate for the Indigenous population was 33.6% in 2021, a 2.1% decrease since 2016, and university completion rates have increased by 1.9%.

The non-Indigenous population saw a similar trend in completion rates. This data represents an overall decrease in the number of people entering trade related careers. Addressing the gap in career areas where there are shortages, such as skilled trades, particularly among Indigenous youth, requires collaborative efforts across various societal pillars.

Encouraging distinctions-based programs and support for Indigenous individuals to pursue careers where there are shortages or high demand will increase the likelihood of youth being able to find meaningful work. Also, supporting careers where sustainable growth is expected will ensure that Indigenous individuals may find meaningful, long-term careers.

It is recommended that a framework be developed which identifies and establishes Indigenous-specific programs and certification opportunities, while also pinpointing areas with a high demand for skilled labor. This framework should be supported by increased funding and driven by Indigenous-led innovations and local engagement to effectively address regional needs.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, and private sector organizations.**

**1.7** [Ensure that human resource policies across all levels of government and organizations respect traditional cultural practices for Indigenous employees to encourage Indigenous employment and retention.](#)

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 22 and UNDA Articles 5, 17, 2, 21)*

A fulsome review of leave options and human resource policies in cooperation with Indigenous employees must be completed by all levels of government, and by those who are responsible for implementing employment conditions, to improve recruitment and retention rates for Indigenous employees. Increasing the number of Indigenous employees employed by unions will ensure that their unique and distinct cultural traditions are being included and valued. An example of traditional cultural practices that must be respected and considered when determining leave options would be attending community or cultural events. Actors responsible for implementing employment change shall look to Indigenous organizations as a model for human resource policy change.

Impactful penalties must be applied for not adhering to Indigenous employment and retention practices.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Unions, federal/provincial/territorial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private sector organizations, and employers.**



- 1.8 [Promote Indigenous representation on union and corporate boards as well as at local and economic planning committees and institutions.](#)  
*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 8 and UNDA Article 18)*

Increased Indigenous representation on union and corporate boards, as well as local economic development committees, is a critical strategy for improving employment outcomes for Indigenous peoples. By influencing policies, fostering cultural competency, advocating for education and training programs, facilitating mentorship, and ensuring inclusive economic initiatives, Indigenous representatives can help dismantle barriers and create pathways to meaningful employment. Policymakers, corporations, and unions must recognize the value of this representation and actively work towards achieving it for the betterment of Indigenous communities and society as a whole.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Unions, corporate boards, federal/provincial, territorial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private sector, economic planning committees, civil society.**

- 1.9 [Provide additional funding to support Indigenous-owned, and on-reserve businesses that hire Indigenous employees.](#)  
*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 22 and UNDA Articles 17(3), 21)*

Indigenous and on-reserve institutions are often more attuned to the cultural and community needs of Indigenous peoples, creating a more supportive work environment that can improve Indigenous job retention and satisfaction. By strengthening and supporting these businesses and institutions, economic growth is fostered within Indigenous communities which can lead to more sustainable job creation over time.

The labour force participation rate continues to be lowest for First Nations on reserve, with the 2021 Census demonstrating an increasing gap (from 17.1 percentage points in 2016 to 18.3 percentage points in 2021) with non-Indigenous rates. By increasing the number of Indigenous-owned and on-reserve businesses, as well as Indigenous-led institutions, this gap may narrow with an increased likelihood of these business to hire Indigenous employees.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Unions, federal/provincial/territorial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private sector organizations, and employers.**

## 2019 Employment Report recommendation still requiring attention:

- 1.10 [Ensure community workforce plans are informed by local employment needs of businesses so post-secondary students can target their education plans accordingly.](#)  
*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 19-23 and UNDA Articles 5, 20, 21)*

The number of different programs active in this area highlights the need for good Navigator Positions across government, all of which need to be aware of actions in other government departments and must communicate with each other regularly.

Navigator positions are crucial in assisting students in navigating the educational system by providing guidance and academic planning, accessing resources and understanding educational pathways. If Navigators and students are aware of community workforce plans and local employment needs, it will help them make informed decisions about their educational future.

A review of the Government of Canada community workforce and training programs (including meaningful data collection and assessment) specific to Indigenous peoples (adequacy of funding to meet needs) would be useful along with recommendations to streamline and rationalize policies and procedures.

## 2. Core Indicator Number 2: Income

### Understanding the Barriers to Income

Income is heavily intertwined with other indicators in this report such as education, employment and entrepreneurship. Therefore, barriers to growing Indigenous income may be addressed in recommendations under other indicators. These barriers include:

#### **Decreased Competitiveness of On-Reserve Employment**

On-reserve occupations may not be equipped to provide competitive salary, benefits and pension packages to employees.

#### **Barriers to the Attainment of Post-Secondary Education**

Insufficient funding, distance from community, and culturally appropriate curriculum and supports prevent Indigenous Peoples from attaining the education needed to enter higher income industries.

#### **Insufficient Training and Mentorship Opportunities**

Shortage of internship and training opportunities that focus on pursuing employment in high income occupations.

#### Recommendations:

- 2.1.** Develop and implement financial literacy programs tailored to Indigenous peoples of all ages. These programs should cover budgeting, saving, investing, and accessing credit to improve overall financial well-being and be implemented both in and outside school settings.

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 1)*

The income gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations has decreased over time; however, a notable gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals persists. Providing financial literacy programs that recognize the systemic inequalities facing Indigenous peoples with respect to income levels will play a crucial role in equipping Indigenous peoples with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed financial decisions, achieve financial goals, and ultimately improve their quality of life.

Providing accessibility of these programs to all levels, beginning with school-aged children recognizes that financial situations and priorities change with age and will assist

in ensuring that financial goals and objectives are met with confidence.

Meaningful change in this area is led by: Civil society, Indigenous community members, federal/provincial/territorial/Indigenous governments, private sector employers including financial institutions, and academic institutions.

- 2.2.** [Ensure that Indigenous communities have access to inclusive financial services. This includes establishing bank branches, credit unions, and not-for-profit microfinance institutions in remote areas and offering culturally relevant financial products.](#)  
*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 3, 93 and UNDA Article 39)*

Providing bank branches, credit unions, and microfinance institutions in remote areas enables Indigenous individuals and businesses to access necessary capital and essential banking services. This access is vital for starting and expanding businesses, leading to job creation and economic growth within the community as well as promoting financial equity.

In addition, offering culturally relevant financial services can promote investment in local enterprises that align with community values and needs and also enhance financial literacy and inclusion. Examples include flexible savings plans, microloans for community projects, and insurance products designed to meet specific community needs.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous community members, federal/provincial/territorial/Indigenous governments, financial institutions, insurance companies.**

- 2.3.** [Provide increased support to Indigenous income-creating organizations \(e.g. Indigenous Development Corporations and Land Trusts and Resource Management Entities\), and structures that generate economic opportunities, support wealth creation and foster Indigenous self-determination.](#)  
*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 3, 93 and UNDA Article 39)*

Providing increased support to Indigenous income-creating organizations can foster increased income levels for Indigenous individuals and work towards closing the income gap experienced between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals.

These organizations can often create direct employment opportunities by employing Indigenous individuals in various roles and can also help Indigenous individuals gain valuable skills that enhance their employability through training and education programs.

Beyond this, Indigenous income-creating organizations can also increase access to capital for Indigenous entrepreneurs and also offer mentorship, business planning and technical assistance to help build sustainable and profitable enterprises while boosting income levels.

From a self-government and economic sovereignty perspective, these institutions can also empower Indigenous communities to make decisions that best serve their economic interests. These organizations will often engage in long-term economic planning, ensuring that income-generating activities are sustainable and aligned with 274 community goals.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Civil society, Indigenous community members, federal/provincial/territorial/Indigenous governments, private sector employers including financial institutions.**

## **2019 Income recommendation requiring additional attention:**

### **2.4. Increase in training and internship opportunities for Indigenous employees in the industries that they are already working in.**

*(Related to UNDA Articles 5, 20, 21)*

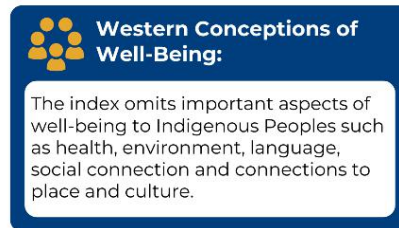
Progress has been made in relation to training opportunities, but more needs to be done on the core issue of internship opportunities. Programming specific to the provision of internship opportunities should be pursued through federal departments responsible for this area and the Regional Development Agencies.

Private sector companies have different programs in place aimed at supporting Indigenous interns as well as many federal departments such as ISC, EDC, NRCAN, etc.

### 3. Core Indicator Number 3: Community Well-Being

#### Understanding the Barriers to Community Well-Being:

This report identified the use of western conceptions of well-being in the Community Well-Being Index as a significant barrier to properly represent Indigenous Peoples and assess their socio-economic conditions:



#### Recommendations:

- 3.1.** Increase funding for distinctions-based, culturally relevant spaces to build social capital and to improve sense of self-identity (e.g.: recreation centers, community-based science centers and land-based learning centers).  
*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 68, 27 and UNDA Articles 3, 20(1), 32)*

This report has demonstrated the benefits that culturally relevant spaces have on community well-being levels and cultural preservation.

Support through policy and additional funding to ensure communities have access and capacity to build culturally relevant spaces to promote cultural resilience and empowerment is crucial.

Working with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities to provide unique cultural insights and indicate their priorities to governments at all levels to ensure that policy and funding levels are adequate and fit the community's needs is an essential piece of implementing this recommendation. Together, these efforts can effectively foster social capital, build trust, and enhance self-identity among community members.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, and private sector organizations.**

- 3.2.** Expand the CWB Index to include Indigenous-specific dimensions of well-being such as health, environment, language, social connections, access to land, and cultural continuity.  
*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 71, 74 and UNDA Article 21)*

Determining the cultural knowledge and context necessary to define what constitutes well-being from an Indigenous perspective is at the forefront of this recommendation. Indicators must be genuinely reflective of Indigenous values, priorities, and unique ways of life.

Support will be required to legitimize research into Indigenous culturally aligned indicators and to incorporate the findings into broader national indices and policies. The expanded definition of the index must be in policymaking to improve the allocation of resources and services to Indigenous populations.

In conducting this research, social actors must ensure that the research methodology is respectful and inclusive and must raise awareness and promote the use of these culturally aligned indicators in wider societal and policy contexts.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector organizations, academic institutions, non-profit organizations, and research bodies.**

**3.3.** [Create leadership development programs to empower Indigenous youth and adults. Focus on building skills, confidence, and opportunities for community leadership and advocacy.](#)

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 2, 22)*

Leadership development programs designed to empower Indigenous youth and adults are crucial for fostering skills, confidence, and opportunities for community leadership and advocacy.

These types of programs provide training in essential skills such as communication, decision-making, conflict resolution, and strategic planning. These skills are vital for effective leadership and governance. In addition, participants gain valuable knowledge and expertise that can enhance their professional careers. This includes understanding organizational management, financial literacy, and project management, which are applicable in various sectors. This personal empowerment is critical for taking on leadership roles and advocating for community needs.

Ensuring that Indigenous community members are prepared to be well-trained leaders, will ensure that they are better equipped to make informed decisions that reflect the best interests of their communities. This leads to more effective governance and positive outcomes overall.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector organizations, academic institutions, non-profit organizations, and research bodies.**

## 4. Underlying Indicator Number 1: Education

### Understanding the Barriers to Education

Education is an important catalyst to economic opportunities and therefore it is vital to understand the barriers that Indigenous Peoples face, including:

 <b>Colonial Education Systems</b> <p>Indigenous students must often navigate a system that does not place importance on their culture, history and language, inhibiting their academic success and desire to pursue post-secondary education.</p>	 <b>Rural Location</b> <p>Urban settings tend to have access to more educational resources that rural areas miss out on such as libraries, mentorship programs and schools/post-secondary institutions.</p>	 <b>Inadequate Funding</b> <p>Unavailable or insufficient funding to help with the high costs of post-secondary tuition, school supplies and living.</p>	 <b>Lack of Culturally Relevant Supports and Sense of Community</b> <p>Many Indigenous students must leave their family and community to pursue post-secondary education at a colonial institution, often feeling like they don't belong and aren't socially, culturally, spiritually and mentally supported.</p>
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#### Recommendations:

- 4.1. Ensure that all Indigenous schools are equipped with necessary infrastructure and educational resources such as libraries and mentorship programs to foster economic success and offer remote schooling to attend post-secondary for Indigenous individuals living in rural and remote communities.

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 2, 16, 62 and UNDA Article 14(2), 21)*

Equipping Indigenous schools with necessary infrastructure, such as libraries, technology, and gymnasiums, ensures that students have access to the same quality of educational resources as those in non-Indigenous and urban schools. This can help bridge the gap in learning outcomes, making students more prepared for higher levels of education.

In addition, offering remote schooling options for post-secondary education is crucial for students living in rural and remote communities. It allows them to access higher education without having to leave their communities, which can be a significant barrier due to cultural ties, family responsibilities, and the high cost of relocating.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector organizations, academic institutions, non-profit organizations, and research bodies.**

- 4.2. Establish a national institute focused on providing Indigenous resources, leading/wise practices, training, mentorship, tools, and templates to educational institutions, including distinctions-based training for Indigenous teachers.

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 16 and UNDA Articles 3, 20, 21)*

Building on the success of Rupertsland Institute (RI) Métis Center of Excellence, which has a mandate in education, research and training to support and improve educational

outcomes for Métis citizens, and other similar institutions, the Board recommends creating a national institute focused on providing distinctions-based resources, training and mentorship to educational institutions.

The success of Indigenous-controlled education is evident with respect to completion rates, as well as overall rates of well-being, particularly when Indigenous students have access to and feel supported to pursue culturally appropriate learning.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector organizations, and research bodies.**

**4.3.** [Allocate funding to encourage First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students to engage in traditional knowledge work to strengthen cultural connection and subsequently improve success in college and university.](#)

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 16 and UNDA Articles 3, 20, 21)*

As identified by Lateisha Ugwuegbula and the Misipawistik Cree Nation in *Reclaiming Education: Indigenous Control of Indigenous Education (August 2020)*, traditional education has many positive long-term effects on youth, such as education achievement, motivation, confidence, mental health, community well-being, and cultural continuity. These positive effects are made evident by the success of Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK) schools in Nova Scotia. These schools are Indigenous-led and controlled, with many programs to promote Mi'kmaq traditional knowledge. The graduation rates of First Nation students in MK schools are 95% — almost 20% higher than the overall Indigenous high school completion rate across Canada in 2021. The pursuit of traditional knowledge should be encouraged for all Indigenous students. Increased funding and policy change must provide additional resources in this area supported by Indigenous communities to ensure that these educational goals are prioritized.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector organizations, and research bodies.**

**4.4.** [Implement school-based health and nutrition programs to support students' physical and mental well-being, enhancing their ability to learn and thrive academically.](#)

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 16 and UNDA Articles 21, 23)*

In 2020, the Indigenous poverty rate was 11.8% and 24% of the Indigenous population was classified as low-income. Breakfast and lunch programs are especially important for vulnerable populations, including low-income students, homeless students, and children from food-insecure households. These programs contribute to improved academic



performance, address disparities in access to healthy food, and ensure students have an equal opportunity to succeed in school.

Regulatory and financial change must occur to ensure that all schools, including schools in Indigenous communities have access to nutritious breakfast and lunch options to contribute to the academic success of students.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by:** Academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, and private sector organizations.

**4.5. Recognize the importance of communities and individuals supporting youth in long-term educational success.**

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 16 and UNDA Articles 21, 21(2), 22)*

In a 2021 survey about Indigenous students' experiences at the University of Alberta, 15.7% of the surveyed students identified a lack of social support as a barrier to their success. The importance of direct, community-based support is foundational for nurturing and sustaining youth in their educational journeys. Structural and policy-based support must be provided and enhanced by additional resources in society and the private sector. Each social actor plays a unique role in a comprehensive approach to supporting long-term educational success.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, and civil society.**

**4.6. Ensure access to distinctions-based, wraparound support services for Indigenous students including access to role models and mentors in the educational field.**

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 2 and UNDA Articles 21, 21(2), 22)*

As identified by Indigenous students at the University of Alberta in a 2021 survey, financial issues, the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health, issues relating to professors and supervisors, a lack of social supports, racism, and a lack of Indigenous representation act as barriers to their success.

It was estimated during a Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs meeting that of the 130,000 Indigenous students qualified to begin post-secondary in Fall 2023, 70% would not be able to enroll due to inadequate or unavailable funding. Indigenous students travelling to urban centers from their home communities due to a lack of access to education also may face high travel and rental costs, which has been exacerbated with the rise of inflation. Additional funding support through government or educational institutions for these indirect costs is essential to ensure the academic success of Indigenous students.

In addition, offering wraparound services designed for Indigenous students (such as counselling, tutoring, mentors and academic advisors) provides comprehensive support to students and their families by addressing various academic, social, emotional, health, and economic needs has a positive impact on academic outcomes.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, non-government organizations, social support organizations, medical institutions, academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, and civil society.**

**4.7. Increase financial assistance for indirect educational costs for Indigenous students such as housing, food, and transportation.**

*(Related to UNDA Articles 21, 39)*

While tuition fees and direct educational expenses like textbooks are often the most visible costs of education, Indigenous students frequently encounter significant indirect costs related to housing, food, transportation, technology and supplies, childcare and visits back to one's home community. These costs can pose substantial barriers to their educational attainment and success.

By acknowledging and addressing these indirect costs, policymakers, educational institutions, and community organizations can work together to create more equitable educational environments that support the success and well-being of Indigenous students.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, and civil society.**

**4.8. Adopt Indigenous culturally aligned curriculum and supports within all primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools.**

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 63 Related to UNDA Articles 5, 17, 2, 21)*

The Canadian Federation of Students and the Province of Ontario reported that 45% of Indigenous students experience racism, isolation, and the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge. Integrating Indigenous curricula and supports into schools, along with incorporating traditional ways of knowing and being, is crucial for promoting understanding and respect for Indigenous cultures within the educational system.

Together, these efforts ensure educational environments become spaces where Indigenous cultures are respected and integrated, fostering a more inclusive and diverse educational landscape.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, and private sector organizations.**

**4.9.** Increase post-secondary funding and allow for flexible education models including lifelong education, upscaling and rescaling, freedom to determine the schools of one's choice, and flexible interdisciplinary programs.

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 16 and UNDA Articles 5, 17, 2, 21)*

This report has highlighted that many communities only provide support and funding for one post-secondary degree and students are often bound by a small selection of eligible post-secondary institutions. Allowing Indigenous students to adapt to the changing demands of the workforce and society through interdisciplinary programs and upscaling and rescaling initiatives would allow them to acquire new skills and meet the evolving needs of the job market.

A change in policy as well as increased funding is required to make it more flexible to provide adequate supports in this area. It is also essential to define the needs in cooperation with Indigenous communities to ensuring the policies are culturally appropriate.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector organizations, and research bodies.**

**4.10.** Increase scholarships, grants, and support services for Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education. Create partnerships between universities and Indigenous communities to offer programs that address specific community needs.

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 17 and UNDA Article 15, 21)*

Enhancing scholarships, grants, and support services for Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education, alongside fostering partnerships between universities and Indigenous communities to offer programs addressing specific community needs, is a comprehensive strategy that promises to improve educational outcomes and community development.

Scholarships and grants can significantly reduce the financial burden on Indigenous students and incentivize the pursuit of higher education. Other benefits include improved retention and graduation rates, culturally relevant programs, economic and social benefits for communities, enhanced university diversity, and strengthened collaborative relationships. By investing in these areas, policymakers, educational institutions, and community leaders can work together to create a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape that empowers Indigenous students and supports the long-term development of Indigenous communities.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector organizations, civil society and research bodies.**

**4.11. Ensure that education funding, programs, and policies are directed and managed by Indigenous communities.**

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 16 and UNDA Articles 3, 5, 17, 2, 21)*

The success of Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey schools in Nova Scotia showcase the importance of Indigenous control in education. In Nova Scotia, the high school graduation rates of First Nation students are 95%. This is above the overall Indigenous high school completion rate of 77.7% across Canada in 2021. This success is attributed to Indigenous-controlled education as 83% of First Nation students in Nova Scotia are educated in MK schools, with an attendance rate of 91%.

The Authority must be given to Indigenous communities to govern and manage their own education systems, including curriculum development, teaching methodologies, language revitalization, and cultural programming. This recognizes Indigenous peoples' inherent rights to self-determination and control over their educational systems, in accordance with their languages, cultures, traditions, and knowledge systems. Additionally, curricula that prioritizes Indigenous culture, language, and history and fosters a culturally safe environment has positive impacts on the trajectory of Indigenous students' lives.

Meaningful change in this area is led by: Academic institutions, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector organizations, and research bodies.

**4.12. Develop income supplement programs to support Indigenous families. These programs could include childcare, housing subsidies, public transportation, and tax credits to reduce financial stress and improve quality of life.**

*(Related to UNDA Article 21)*

Income supplement programs can provide critical support to Indigenous families, help address economic disparities, and enhance the overall well-being of Indigenous communities. By alleviating the financial burden of childcare for example, parents can seek and maintain employment, thereby increasing their household income and financial stability. Housing subsidies also make it possible for Indigenous families to afford safe and stable housing. This reduces the likelihood of homelessness or housing instability, which can have severe negative impacts on health and well-being. Subsidized public transportation provides families with affordable and reliable access to essential services, such as healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. This is particularly crucial for those living in remote or rural areas. Tax credits can incentivize employment by increasing the take-home pay of low- to moderate-income workers, thereby encouraging workforce participation and reducing poverty.

By addressing specific needs and challenges faced by Indigenous communities, these initiatives contribute to greater economic stability, improved health and well-being, and increased opportunities for education and employment. Policymakers and community leaders must continue to advocate for and implement these programs to foster equitable and sustainable development for Indigenous families.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector organizations and civil society.**

## **2019 Education recommendations requiring additional attention:**

### **4.13. [Improve educational opportunities for the Indigenous population, especially First Nations on reserve.](#)**

(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 1, 16-18, 62 & UNDA Articles 5, 20, 21)

Of the data collected by the 2021 Census, First Nations on reserve had some of the lowest completion rates for high school, college and university at 60%, 24.9% and 9.1%, respectively.

The AFN examined progress on the TRC Calls to Action, and in relation to education, indicated:

Moderate progress has been made in this area and most notably, the ongoing efforts towards the completion of Call to Action #11. Future budget announcements must continue to commit further funding as there is still a persistent backlog of First Nations students seeking a postsecondary education. Further progress on Action #8 is possible if the government reduces funding discrepancies between on- and off-reserve First Nations.

Going forward, additional attention should be given to the education of Indigenous Peoples in financial literacy and capacity.

Budget 2024 announced \$649.4 million over two years to improve elementary and secondary education on reserve and ensure funding formulas to meet the needs of growing communities which shall provide increased support in pursuit of this recommendation. While this represents a step in the right direction, according to the Assembly of First Nations, 2024 statements, there remains a significant shortfall in education funding for First Nations. The gap has grown, with the AFN estimating that over \$349 billion is required to close the broader infrastructure gap by 2030, which includes education infrastructure. While the AFN has not specified the exact portion of the infrastructure gap that is directly related to education, it has emphasized that a significant portion of this gap involves inadequate school infrastructure, including buildings, facilities, and resources necessary to provide quality education to First Nations students. This shortfall contributes to the overall funding deficiencies in achieving educational parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

**4.14.** [Invest in distance education programs to assist remote students with obtaining higher levels of education would remove some barriers of expense and distance.](#)  
*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 60, 62, 68, 80 and UNDA Articles 5, 20,21)*

As observed in this report Indigenous students in rural areas have the lowest high school and post-secondary attainment rates. Rural location has the least effect on college completion rates, which has been attributed to there being more colleges or other non-university post-secondary institutions than universities, and more located in rural areas. Rural location has the largest effect on university completion rates at 18% in comparison to 33% in population centers.

The NIEDB continues to call upon partners within the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework to consider transitioning Nunavut Arctic College to university status.

Budget 2024 announced \$5.2 million over two years to support Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning as they support access to culturally appropriate post-secondary education that is accessible to Indigenous students in the North in support of this recommendation.

The common need for Indigenous students to leave their community and family supports to attend post-secondary and at institutions where they are not culturally supported have been identified as inhibiting factors for educational attainment. More is needed to understand the drivers for successful distance education programs and the barriers that current exist to invest in that area.

**4.15.** [Ongoing and expanded scholarship funding for Indigenous students pursuing post-secondary education.](#)  
*(Related to UNDA Article 5, 20, 21)*

It was estimated during a Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs meeting that of the 130,000 Indigenous students qualified to begin post-secondary in Fall 2023, 70% would not be able to enroll due to inadequate funding.

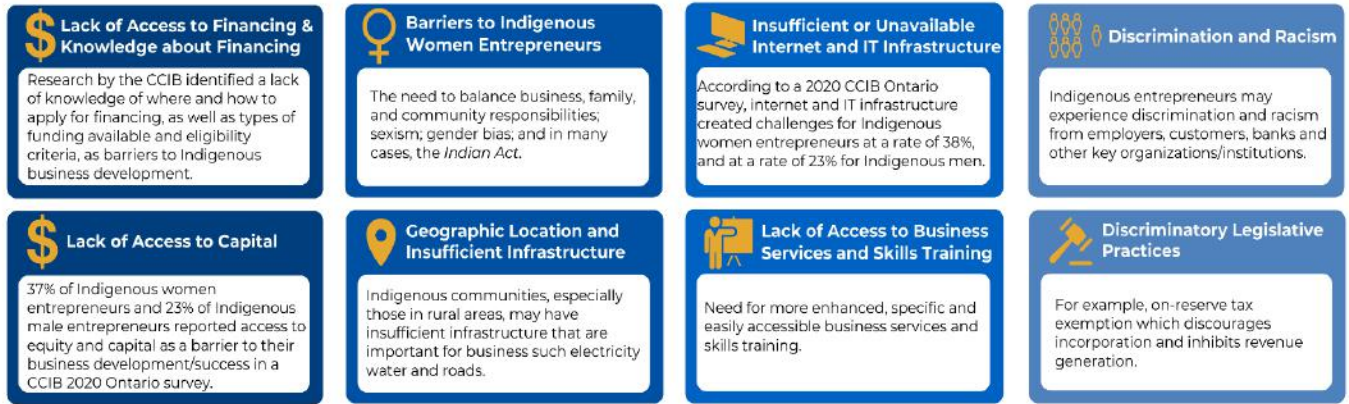
Federal departments currently provide funding and support to post-secondary education strategies and continue to build their relationship with Indspire, however it is recommended that Federal funding be allocated directly Indigenous communities and their education authorities, as those best placed to support students in their communities.

Budget 2024 also announced \$242.7 million over three years to increase access to post-secondary education for First Nations students through the Post-Secondary Student Support Program in support of this recommendation. This budget announcement does not include any new funding for the Inuit or Metis post-secondary education; however, Budget 2019 did announce \$487.5 million over ten years invested in Inuit and Métis post-secondary education strategies. Funding has still been identified as an inhibiting factor for all identity groups within this report.

## 5. Underlying Indicator: Entrepreneurship

### Understanding the Barriers to Entrepreneurship

As a key driver of economic growth and development, it is important to understand and address the following barriers to Indigenous entrepreneurship



#### Recommendations:

- 5.1. Enhance support for Indigenous businesses to expand into international markets, leveraging opportunities provided by trade agreements like the Indigenous Peoples Economic, Trade, and Cooperation Arrangement, the Canada United States Mexico Agreement, and other international trade agreements.

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 102-107)*

Indigenous businesses in remote regions are 65% less likely to engage in exporting compared to urban-based Indigenous SMEs. This may be a result of infrastructure gaps (both physical and digital) or the great distance to international markets that many Indigenous entrepreneurs based in remote areas contend with. The new trade agreement, known as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), aims to address some of these concerns, by preserving pre-existing carve-outs affecting to continue monitoring and supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs as they navigate global trade opportunities by enhancing support to existing programs that help facilitate international trade and leveraging new opportunities for expansion into new markets.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/international/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, private sector and international organizations, research bodies.**

- 5.2. Enhance the support structures for Indigenous entrepreneurs, including tailored financial support, access to markets, business support infrastructure, and regulatory and legal advice.  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 2, 5, 14, 19, 20, 67 and UNDA Articles 3,5, 21)

Empowering Indigenous entrepreneurs is essential to ensure the economic success of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous businesses often face unique challenges including lower income and education levels, geographic issues (distance from financial institutions, lack of roads and transportation) and insufficient business support infrastructure such as lack of effective information technology equipment or network. Therefore, they require tailored and distinct financial support to mitigate against these factors.

Guidance and practical tools in the form of regulatory and legal advice are essential to support Indigenous businesses as they navigate the complex entrepreneurial space. An Indigenous entrepreneur, who feels supported through appropriate, effective, and culturally aligned regulations and equipped with the right economic infrastructure, will contribute overall to the economic success of Indigenous peoples. Additional steps must be taken to further expand on the success of Indigenous businesses and develop a more complete framework to address the persistent barriers that Indigenous governments, businesses, and individuals face in accessing capital and financial services.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, non-government organizations, research and training bodies, unions, employers, non-profit organizations, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private organizations, and civil society.**

- 5.3. Ensure that government programs and policy directives at all levels are easily accessible and understandable, making accessing funding and program benefits easier and more efficient to the recipient.  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 5, 6, 23 and UNDA Articles 3, 5, 21)

In Ontario in 2020, 33% of Indigenous women entrepreneurs and 30% of Indigenous men entrepreneurs identified access to financing as an obstacle for entrepreneurship. Further, 37% of the women and 23% of the men also identified access to equity and capital as a barrier.

The ability to easily navigate government processes has been cited as a significant barrier for Indigenous individuals consistently. Indigenous businesses may find government processes daunting and administratively heavy, and this may impact their ability to pursue funding or access other initiatives. Access to funding and programming must be made clear, concise, and easily accessible.



An outreach and education portion of this recommendation would also be beneficial to ensure that knowledge surrounding government processes is achieved. In addition, ease of access to people who can guide Indigenous businesses through government processes is required.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, and civil society.**

- 5.4.** [Require all employers, banks and investment/hiring organizations and institutions to complete anti-racism, anti-sexism, discrimination and bias prevention training.](#)  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 14, 30 and UNDA Articles 1, 21)

By training financial institutions and investors to recognize and mitigate unconscious biases, Indigenous entrepreneurs are more likely to receive fair evaluations of their business proposals and increase their lending potential. This can lead to improved access to loans, grants, and other financial services that are crucial for starting and growing a business.

Furthermore, organizations that complete anti-discrimination training are more likely to adopt inclusive hiring practices and facilitate inclusive working environments. This not only benefits Indigenous entrepreneurs who are building their teams but also increases the likelihood of Indigenous people being hired by these organizations, supporting broader economic participation.

This type of training is crucial to break down stereotypes and misconceptions that often hinder relationships between Indigenous entrepreneurs and non-Indigenous businesses or organizations. By fostering mutual understanding and respect, it can open doors to new partnerships, collaborations, and networking opportunities.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, non-government organizations, research and training bodies, unions, employers, non-profit organizations, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private organizations, and civil society.**

- 5.5.** [Develop websites, booklets, and/or other resources on best practices in supporting Indigenous entrepreneurship.](#)  
(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 4 and UNDA Articles 3, 5, 21)

*Practical, real-world expertise on best practices and success stories in supporting Indigenous entrepreneurship is crucial for implementing this recommendation.*

*Businesses, including entrepreneurial incubators and accelerators, possess firsthand knowledge and expertise in what works and what doesn't in the entrepreneurial landscape. Case studies, insights, and strategic advice that are immediately applicable and beneficial for current and aspiring entrepreneurs are paramount to ensure that Indigenous entrepreneurs are supported in their endeavors.*

Policymaking, funding, and the creation of educational resources, including comprehensive guides and best practices, networking opportunities, and legal and regulatory guidance, may also assist in this area. In addition, offering training programs, workshops, and publications that promote entrepreneurial skills and best practices may increase the likelihood of success for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

Each societal pillar plays a vital role, with their contributions collectively enriching the ecosystem of entrepreneurial support.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, non-government organizations, research and training bodies, unions, employers, non-profit organizations, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, and civil society.**

- 5.6. [Ensure government and organization-wide adoption of Indigenous procurement strategies, including adopting the National Indigenous Procurement Working Group's definition of "Indigenous business" and ensure a more rigorous definition system is developed to mitigate against false claims of Indigeneity.](#)  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 20, 5, 67 and UNDA Articles 3, 5, 17(1), 20, 21)

The Government of Canada has made a commitment to increase Indigenous business participation in federal procurement by setting a minimum target of 5% of federal contracts to be awarded to Indigenous businesses. This standard has yet to be met, however should, at a minimum, be adopted by all levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal) as a standard to ensure that First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and urban, rural and remote Indigenous businesses may benefit from procurement contracts.

It is crucial that all levels of government and private and public sector organizations adopt the definition created in partnership by several national Indigenous organizations, including the NIEDB, as part of the National Indigenous Procurement Working Group. This definition was created to ensure that there is a consistent way of defining and verifying the legitimacy of Indigenous businesses.

Establishing a rigorous identification process for verifying the legitimacy of Indigenous businesses is a critical step to mitigating against the socio-economic harm that is caused to First Nation, Inuit, Métis businesses and communities as a result of false claims of Indigeneity.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, non-government organizations, unions, employers, non-profit organizations, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private sector, and civil society.**

- 5.7. [Devolve the oversight of Indigenous procurement strategies across government and private sector to Indigenous organizations.](#)  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 94, 95 and UNDA Article 3, 5)

Indigenous organizations are best placed to ensure that a rigorous definition system is maintained and that the Government of Canada, all levels of government, and private sector organizations are adhering to procurement strategies and verifying the legitimacy of Indigenous business in the procurement space.

Devolving the oversight of these processes to Indigenous organizations accountable to Indigenous communities will ensure that procurement targets are met, and that the priorities and values of Indigenous communities are incorporated into the procurement space.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, non-government organizations, employers, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private sector, and civil society.**

- 5.8. [Support the development of Indigenous Chambers of Commerce.](#)  
(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 3)

As this report has demonstrated, lack of access to funding and knowledge about financial procedures represents a significant barrier for Indigenous entrepreneurship. Indigenous Chambers of Commerce have the potential to serve as centralized resource hubs, offering information on funding opportunities, business training programs, and legal advice tailored to the specific needs of Indigenous businesses. Supporting the development of such chambers through funding and advocacy could support the development of policies and initiatives that support Indigenous businesses, ensuring their interests are represented at local, regional, and national levels. This advocacy can lead to more favorable business conditions, including access to grants, loans, and other financial support.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, non-government organizations, employers, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private sector, funding institutions and civil society.**

**5.9. Support Indigenous Loan Guarantee Programs such as the one introduced in Budget 2024 and other provincial models.**

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 92 and UNDA Article 21)*

The Indigenous Loan Guarantee Program introduced in Canada's 2024 budget is designed to provide up to \$5 billion in loan guarantees to Indigenous communities and build on the sources of provincial loan guarantee programs which have already facilitated significant economic benefits for Indigenous communities. As cited in the report access to capital and stable lenders for Indigenous peoples and communities represents a significant barrier towards economic development.

By guaranteeing loans, the government allows Indigenous borrowers to benefit from lower interest rates, which can make financing more affordable and reduce the overall cost of their investments. These programs empower Indigenous communities to take control over their economic situations and have equity in ownership in major projects, thereby increasing economic sovereignty.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, non-government organizations, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private sector, and civil society and financial institutions.**

## **2019 Entrepreneurship recommendation requiring additional attention:**

**5.10. Aboriginal Financial Institutions are funded to ensure Indigenous entrepreneurs can obtain financing.**

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 5, 84, 92, 93 and UNDA Articles 5, 20, 21)*

The NIEDB supports the Indigenous-led innovations that have been developed to address this issue, notably the national network of Indigenous Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the institutions created under the *First Nations Fiscal Management Act* (FNFMA), in particular, the First Nations Finance Authority (FNFA). Additional steps can be taken to further expand on their success and develop a more complete framework to address the persistent barriers that Indigenous governments, businesses, and individuals face in accessing capital and financial services.

The network of Indigenous Financial Institutions (IFIs) across Canada is a success story being emulated globally. Support for IFIs should be increased, as these entities are key to supporting the growth of Indigenous businesses and economies across Canada.

Federal departments including ISC, AAFC, and DFO, as well as private sector corporations, have provided operational support to financial institutions and frameworks and policy to support Indigenous access to capital.

Budget 2024 announced \$350 million over five years to renew Canada's commitment to Indigenous Financial Institutions and to include \$30 million over five years to Métis Capital Corporations in support of this recommendation.

## 6. Underlying Indicator Number 3: Governance

### Understanding the Barriers to Governance

Given the following systemic barriers, Indigenous-led governance is critical to economic reconciliation:



#### Recommendations:

- 6.1.** Provide support for governance systems that are Indigenous-led and aligned with a community's unique traditional culture, including representing the voices of women, children, and elders.

*(Related to UNDA Articles 32(1), 20)*



There is primary importance of defining and leading governance models in line with the traditional values and cultural history of Indigenous communities. By taking control over the shape of their governance structures, Indigenous communities may advocate and provide education efforts in support of this recommendation.

Creating an enabling environment that respects and protects these rights, while also fostering respect and support and promoting voices of Indigenous women, children and elders is essential for the effective implementation of community-driven governance systems.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, and civil society.**

- 6.2.** Provide support for the development of leading Indigenous governance tools and practices to be shared with Indigenous communities.

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 47, 66 and UNDA Articles 3, 4)*

By gathering leading practices and lessons learned with respect to leading governance tools and practices, Indigenous communities will feel supported and empowered to generate governance structures in line with their unique priorities and values.

Funding to support a hub or other model whereby effective governance tools can be made accessible to Indigenous communities will ensure that Indigenous communities are equipped with the necessary tools to effectively govern their peoples. Involve or build upon the work of Indigenous organizations and academic institutions.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, and civil society.**

**6.3.** Encourage more First Nations to enact property taxation by-laws to generate own-sourced revenue for community reinvestment from non-Indigenous entities operating in their territories.

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 91 and UNDA Article 32(1))*

At the end of 2022-2023, 144 First Nations were exercising property taxation authority under the FNFMA, and 28 First Nations were enacting property taxation by-laws under section 83 of the *Indian Act*, for a total of 172 First Nations.<sup>243</sup> There has been an 11.7% increase in the total number of First Nations enacting property taxation by-laws since the 154 in 2018 that was reported in the 2019 IEPR.

Issuing property taxation on reserve land helps improve the well-being of First Nations. By enacting a property taxation law, a First Nation establishes jurisdiction over the land to which it is applied, preventing provincial and municipal governments from taxing non-band members using the land. Further, real property taxation is a source of self-generated revenue for First Nations that can be reinvested back into the community to address needs and for economic growth.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: First Nations communities, non-government organizations, employers, non-profit organizations, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private sector, and civil society.**

**6.4.** Implement transparent and results-based processes that are Indigenous-led, ensuring Indigenous data sovereignty and governance as well as tracking and reporting on data collection efforts and results so that community members may access and see change firsthand.

*(Related to UNDA Articles 3, 5, 20, 21)*

Communities typically provide data to governments and other organizations with the goal of creating real and meaningful change but are often not provided with access to results in return. Participating in transparent and open processes, through Indigenous-led data governance, would provide Indigenous communities with the ability to witness change firsthand. Standard setting and providing the necessary infrastructure for transparent governance is essential for the implementation of this recommendation.

A framework that is supported through accountability and effective communication is necessary for effective community governance that suits the local context and values.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, research and data gathering bodies, non-profit organizations.**

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<sup>243</sup> Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. (2023).

**6.5.** [Develop and expand programs services offered by Friendship Centres and other Indigenous organizations that are tailored to the unique needs of urban Indigenous populations.](#)

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 63)*

Friendship Centres and other Indigenous organizations such as health, housing and employment centres, supporting urban Indigenous peoples, play an important role in filling the gaps between culturally appropriate community supports and provincial services of general application for urban Indigenous persons. By providing culturally appropriate services and support, Friendship Centres and Indigenous-led service organizations improve the well-being of Indigenous persons living in urban centres. This recommendation reflects the importance of allocating attention and resources towards the unique needs of urban Indigenous populations.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by:** Indigenous communities, non-profit organizations, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, private organizations, and civil society.

## **2019 Governance recommendation requiring additional attention:**

**6.6.** [Ongoing and expanded support for governance and financial management training and certification.](#)

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 5, 84, 92, 93 and UNDA Articles 5, 20,21, 23)*

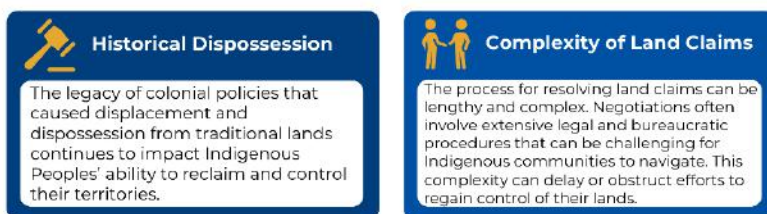
More needs to be done to incentivize Indigenous communities taking advantage of self-government processes and the FNFMA at the local, regional, and national levels. At the end of 2022-2023, 144 First Nations were exercising property taxation authority under the FNFMA.

CIRNAC and ISC, through the FNFMA, have seen an increase in communities receiving certification and are proceeding with establishing a new national Infrastructure institute under the Act.

## 7. Underlying Indicator Number 4: Lands and Resources

### Understanding the Barriers to Lands and Resources

Indigenous Peoples in Canada face several significant barriers to controlling their lands. These barriers are deeply rooted in historical, legal, and systemic issues:



#### Recommendations:

- 7.1.** Complete the work towards a First Nations-led alternative for the Additions to Reserve (ATR) program, focused on reconciliation and support for First Nations' visions for a stronger land base.

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 36, 38, 40 and UNDA Articles 32, 23)*

Indigenous Services Canada is currently redesigning the ATR policy with First Nations leadership. Policy options are set to be provided in spring 2025. Continued work on the ATR policy is crucial to address the challenges that currently exist in the ATR process, such as long and inconsistent processing times and uncertainty, frustration, and lost opportunities for First Nations due to competing third-party interests.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by:** Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, and civil society.

- 7.2.** Develop a legal framework in Canada that explicitly recognizes Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) as a form of protected area and ensure its alignment with Indigenous values towards land, conservation, and stewardship, while also highlighting the economic benefits of land stewardship, including job creation and promotion of sustainable economic practices.]

*(Related to UNDA Article 23, 32)*

A 2016 study on the Łutsël K'é Dene and Dehcho Guardian program demonstrated that an initial investment of \$4.5 million in an IPCA generated approximately \$11.1 million in social, economic, cultural, and environmental value. To reap these benefits, legislative action to recognize IPCA as a form of protected area, including an Indigenous-led scoping and design exercise, is crucial to meet the diverse and unique needs of Indigenous communities in Canada. This approach is a significant change in perspective from the colonial approach to protected areas where "parks" and "protected areas" were designed for recreational enjoyment. In that approach, the Indigenous connection and title to the land was an obstacle resulting in scenarios



where communities were forced to relocate or were restricted access by imposed jurisdictions which effectively eliminated the Indigenous practices and economies from the area. No lands should be allocated to Indigenous conservancy groups without addressing the First Nations issues in those lands.

Indigenous-led advocacy and expertise in this area will result in increased Indigenous ownership over their lands and a shift away from colonial practices.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Indigenous communities, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, civil society, and private sector organizations.**

**7.3.** [Support and expand the First Nations Land Management Act \(FNLMA\) initiative to increase First Nations' control over their land management functions.](#)

*(Related to UNDA Articles 26, 27)*

The FNLMA initiative has provided many benefits to First Nation communities, including being a tool for self-government and a way to increase economic development, and allowing them to create and implement their own laws and regulations that reflect their traditional customs, practices, and knowledge. In 2022, 194 First Nations had joined the FNLM initiative.

The FNLM initiative allows communities to transition to full self-government, thereby fulfilling their rights under *UNDRIP* to self-determination and to their lands.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments and Indigenous communities.**

**7.4.** [Increase resources for training and capacity building for Indigenous land-managers to ensure effective and autonomous land management.](#)

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 32, 41, 47 and UNDA Articles 25, 26)*

Empowering Indigenous communities with the necessary skills and knowledge to manage their lands not only honors their traditional stewardship but also promotes sustainable development, cultural preservation, and economic self-sufficiency. Indigenous land managers possess traditional ecological knowledge that is not accessible elsewhere. Empowered land managers can implement practices that protect and enhance the biodiversity of their lands and pass down this traditional knowledge over generations. Additional funding for training and capacity can help integrate traditional knowledge with modern techniques leading to more effective and sustainable environmental stewardship.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments Indigenous communities, environmental organizations.**

## 2019 Lands and Resources recommendation requiring additional attention:

- 7.5. [Increase resources to the ATR program to expedite applications.](#)  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 36, 38, 40 and UNDA Articles 32, 23)

Reformed Specific Claims processes are a good start to progress in this area, including the establishment of a Center for Resolution of Specific Claims. This center provides funding and support throughout the process. Despite this, additional funding is needed to accelerate work on existing ATR requests and completion of the redesign of the ATR process.

## 8. Underlying Indicator Number 5: Infrastructure

### Understanding the Barriers to Infrastructure

To understand the infrastructure gap and the need for the related recommendations, the following barriers must be considered:



### Recommendations:

- 8.1. [Transform the Government of Canada's Community Infrastructure Policy to provide increased Indigenous control over infrastructure management and access on their lands.](#)  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 59, 75, 80 and UNDA Articles 3, 32)

In 2024, the Assembly of First Nations found the infrastructure gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous communities to be \$349.2 billion, which is influenced by Canada's colonial legislation and policy. Indigenous control over infrastructure management and lands is a crucial aspect of self-determination and sovereignty for Indigenous peoples. Steps must be taken to recognize Indigenous control over infrastructure policy in their territories to ensure that decisions that are made are in line with Indigenous cultural practices, protect their environment, and promote economic development on their terms. Capacity funding and training is also required to ensure that Indigenous communities can oversee infrastructure management in their territories.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, civil society, and private sector organizations.**

**8.2.** Increase funding for accessible and culturally relevant spaces for vulnerable Indigenous community members, including for Elders and senior Indigenous individuals, as well as those dealing with addictions, criminality, and homelessness. *(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 68, 27 and UNDA Articles 3, 20 (1), 32)*

A critical gap that has been noted in conjunction with the aging Indigenous population and lack of critical infrastructure has been the lack of culturally appropriate homes for senior citizens. Half of the housing conditions in Inuit Nunangat have been cited by CBC news as overcrowded<sup>244</sup>, which makes for difficult situations, particularly for Indigenous seniors. Indigenous seniors play a vital role in the cultural continuity and life knowledge of their families and communities, but they also face many social and economic challenges, which can place them at risk of social isolation. Ensuring that there are culturally appropriate, safe spaces for Indigenous seniors to connect and live with proper care is essential for protecting senior Indigenous individuals who are knowledge-keepers and promote cultural continuity.

Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, and private sector organizations.

**8.3.** Increase funding and support for the construction and renovation of critical infrastructure in Indigenous communities, including regulated child-care facilities, proper academic facilities, and addressing housing gaps, particularly in Inuit communities, while recognizing the significant capital costs in rural and remote regions. *(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 69 and UNDA Articles 23, 32)*

A critical gap exists between housing infrastructure in Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Notably, Indigenous households are more often in core housing need, more likely to live in dwellings that are crowded, and more likely to live in dwellings in need of major repairs. Additionally, among Indigenous identity groups, Inuit communities experience the most unsuitable housing conditions and largest gap of other infrastructure facilities, such as childcare facilities and academic facilities. In 2021, 26.2% of Inuit dwellings were in need of major repairs, 20.7% of households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 10% lived in housing with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 9.4% with a three-bedroom shortfall.

This recommendation aims to ensure that Indigenous communities, and Inuit communities in particular, have access to this basic human right that is recognized as

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<sup>244</sup> Passafiume, A. (2023, November 27). Federal advocate calls Inuit housing conditions a “staggering failure” of government. CBC.

critical to other economic, social, and cultural rights. Prioritizing housing and other critical infrastructure facilities in turn prioritizes the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, non-profit organizations, private sector organizations, and civil society.**

**8.4. Invest in capacity-building initiatives to enable Indigenous communities to manage and maintain their infrastructure.**

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 66, 67, 68 and UNDA Article 5)*

While the federal government provides some funds for basic infrastructure on Indigenous lands, they have failed to provide sufficient resources to support the development and maintenance of infrastructure assets, which has led to First Nations lacking the ability to have comparable infrastructure assets to those found in other jurisdictions and the ability to maintain and manage infrastructure on their lands.

By transferring Indigenous control over infrastructure projects in their traditional territories and investing in capacity-building initiatives, Indigenous peoples will be able to assert control over major infrastructure projects and maintain and manage them for years to come, effectively enhancing and contributing to jobs in Indigenous communities.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, non-profit organizations, private sector organizations, and civil society.**

**8.5.**

**Increase Indigenous involvement and ownership in renewable energy projects to promote sustainable energy solutions.**

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 49, 52, 55 and UNDA Articles 29(1), 32)*

Increasing Indigenous involvement and ownership in renewable energy projects is essential for promoting sustainable energy solutions and addresses environmental and economic goals while also aligning with the principles of self-determination and social equity for Indigenous communities.

Renewable energy projects create a variety of job opportunities, from construction and maintenance to technical and administrative roles. Indigenous involvement ensures that these jobs benefit local communities directly. In addition, ownership in renewable energy projects provides a steady income stream for Indigenous communities. Profits from these ventures can be reinvested in community development.

Indigenous communities also have a deep understanding and respect for the environment, ensuring that renewable energy projects are conducted sustainably, preserving valuable ecosystems.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, non-profit organizations, private sector organizations, and civil society.**

## **2019 Infrastructure recommendations requiring additional attention:**

### **8.6. Ongoing and expanded investments are required to ensure homes are repaired and new homes are built.**

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 69 and UNDA Articles 23, 32)*

The 2021 Census reported that 19.1% of First Nation dwellings, 10% of Métis dwellings, and 26.3% of Inuit dwellings need major repairs. The 2021 Census also revealed that, among Inuit, 20.7% of households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 10% with a two-bedroom shortfall, and 9.4% with a three-bedroom shortfall. In contrast, 12.9% of First Nation households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 4.8% in a two-bedroom shortfall, and 3.8% in a three-bedroom shortfall. 6.2% of Métis households lived in housing with a one-bedroom shortfall, 1.3% in a two-bedroom shortfall, and 0.5% in a three-bedroom shortfall.

Significant investments have been made in this area, however ongoing investments are required to ensure homes are repaired and new homes are built to keep the pace with growing communities.

Budget 2024 announced \$918 million over five years to accelerate work to narrow housing and infrastructure gaps in support of this recommendation. In early 2025, the Indigenous Homes Innovation Initiative through Impact Canada and Indigenous Services Canada will be issuing a case study on the innovative projects funded with examples and recommendations on leading practices on Indigenous housing.

Greater efforts should be taken to transfer housing service to Indigenous control at the local level, and via an Indigenous Infrastructure Institute at the national level. Continued work on transformative change with respect to Indigenous housing policy is also required.

Support having Indigenous Financial Institutions as a vehicle for delivery of housing mortgages for Indigenous peoples to purchase or build new housing, both in and outside, Indigenous communities to alleviate the housing backlog.

### **8.7. Bring high-speed broadband and mobile services to Indigenous communities. (Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 60-62, 80 and UNDA Articles 23, 32)**

As of 2021, none of the provinces and territories had 100% of First Nations reserves with minimum internet speeds of 50/10/unlimited. Increasing speed and data capacity to all Indigenous communities is essential to social and economic development.

Forecasting

community need to be ahead of current demand and in consideration of housing realities will ensure connectivity is less likely to be outdated before it becomes a reality.

There is also the opportunity to use improved connectivity for Indigenous business to enhance community connectivity, and to build technological capacity through employment and training of Indigenous Peoples.

- 8.8. Update the Infrastructure Index Report every two years.**  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 80 and UNDA Articles 23, 32)

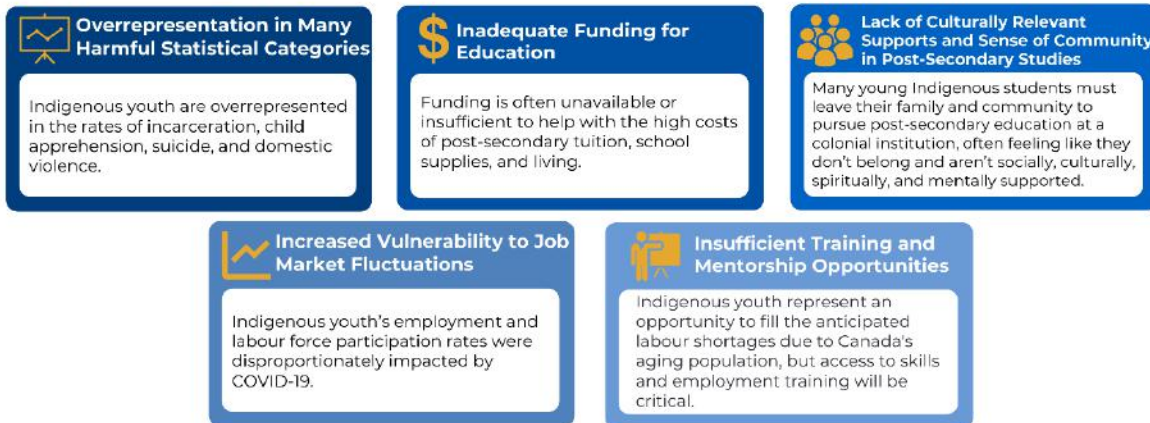
ISC and Community Infrastructure Branch is undertaking research into the benefits of social infrastructure and how to maximize economic benefits of social infrastructure investments.

Also, a review of Government of Canada community infrastructure programming specific to Indigenous communities (adequacy of funding and reach to meet needs, recommendations to streamline and rationalize policies and procedures) is needed.

## 9. Underlying Indicator Number 6: Youth

### Understanding the Barriers to Youth

Indigenous youth face particular barriers as compared to non-Indigenous youth and the rest of the Indigenous population. These barriers must be address to capitalize on their potential as they begin practicing in economic development:



#### Recommendations:

- 9.1. Implement alternative, Indigenous-led youth employment partnerships in colleges and trade schools, beyond what Federal Government has now, and beyond Nation employment.**  
(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 2 and UNDA Articles 3, 5, 32)

Given that the Indigenous population is young and growing, Indigenous youth hold the potential to fill the anticipated labour shortages due to Canada's aging population. To do so, Indigenous youth require skills and employment training. Yet, the Indigenous youth unemployment rate in 2021 was 23.3%.

This recommendation reflects the shift towards Indigenous-led solutions, recognizing the primary importance of community initiative and leadership. Indigenous youth should feel empowered to take employment opportunities into their own hands. Facilitating and promoting the necessary environment for these partnerships to flourish and succeed in support of youth employment opportunities will ensure the effective implementation of this recommendation.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Private sector organizations, federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, civil society, and youth organizations.**

**9.2.** [Focus on systemic change to improve outcomes for youth.](#)  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 73,84,88 & UNDA Articles 5,17(2),20,21)

To further support Indigenous youth in ways that go beyond traditional employment and education initiatives, a holistic approach that encompasses cultural, social, and environmental factors is needed. Cultural preservation and integration and mental health and wellness programs that offer support tailored to the cultural and social context of Indigenous communities can make a difference. This includes access to Indigenous healers and Western mental health professionals who are trained in culturally sensitive approaches.

Creating the conditions necessary for systemic change that can lead to improved outcomes for youth across multiple aspects of their lives is critical. Enhanced support for these efforts through advocacy and service delivery, while ensuring cultural alignment and community-specific tailoring of solutions, will see the effective implementation of this recommendation.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, civil society, private sector organizations, social support organizations, and environmental organizations.**

## **2019 Youth recommendations requiring additional attention:**

**9.3.** [Promote and support entrepreneurship as a valid career option for youth.](#)  
(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 2 & UNDA Articles 5, 17(2), 20, 21, 23,32)

Supporting entrepreneurship programs provided by academic institutions, NGOs, not-for-profits, and charitable organizations can significantly promote entrepreneurship as a

viable career option for Indigenous youth by offering tailored training, mentoring and resources and also by connecting youth with established entrepreneurs and business leaders.

These programs also empower Indigenous youth to create economic opportunities within their communities.

Exposing youth to summer or part-time job opportunities in businesses, both in and outside of the community, will help the youth gain an understanding of various businesses and sectors. Pre-employment training, transportation to the workplace, and assistance with required work equipment and/or business attire should also be supported financially.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, civil society, private sector organizations, and social support organizations.**

- 9.4.** Support Indigenous healing and employment hubs; invest in basic education infrastructure; develop distance education training; create an alumni fund to enable mentorship; and invest in Indigenous scholarship funding to support post-secondary education.

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 2 and UNDA Articles 5, 20, 21, 23)*

It is specifically recommended that the Government create urban Indigenous healing and employment hubs; invest in basic education infrastructure; develop distance education training; create an alumni fund to enable mentorship; and increase investments in Indigenous post-secondary education.

- 9.5.** Include family and community considerations and perspectives in youth program development.

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 2 and UNDA Articles 5, 20, 21, 23)*

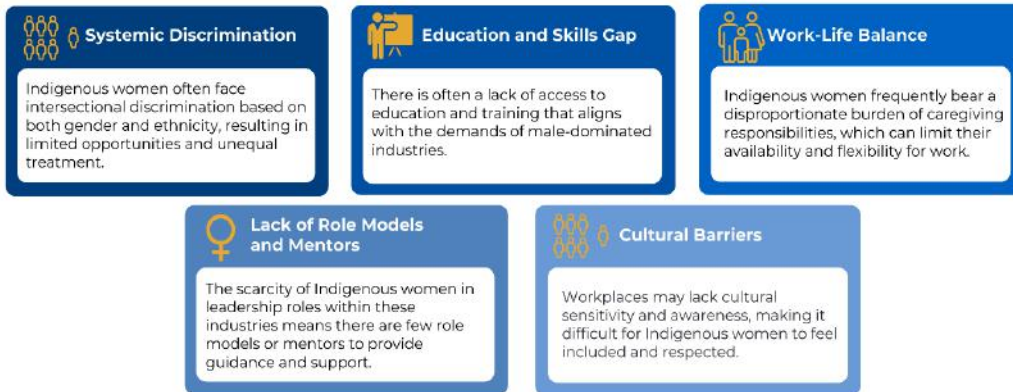
As evidenced throughout this report, community and family inclusion in the development of programming is essential to ensure that programs and policies are designed to meet the unique needs of Indigenous youth. The inclusion of the voice of Elders has been cited as being beneficial with respect to the implementation of this recommendation.



## 10. Gender Specific Recommendations:

### Understanding the Gender Specific Barriers

Indigenous communities face numerous barriers to economic prosperity, but these barriers can manifest differently for men and women due to distinct social roles, responsibilities, and experiences. Understanding these gender-specific barriers is essential for developing targeted interventions that promote economic equity and empowerment for both Indigenous men and women:



#### Recommendations:

- 10.1.** Increase availability and funding towards policy-development and programs that address the gender-specific barriers experienced by Indigenous peoples (e.g., childcare, mentorship programs, and targeted training).

*(Related to UNDA Articles 5, 20, 21)*

The gap in the employment rate of Indigenous men and women has widened since 2016, from 2.1 percentage points in 2016 to 3.1 percentage points in 2021. Wrap around supports, such as childcare, to address barriers that Indigenous women may face when pursuing education or employment opportunities, which could support advancement in their careers, are needed to ensure that the gaps are closed between Indigenous men and women's employment and educational attainment levels. Understanding the unique experiences of Indigenous women in the educational and employment field is a critical step to ensuring that programs and policies are designed to meet their needs. Access to childcare in communities has been cited as a barrier impacting First Nations, Inuit, and Métis women and has impacted their ability to enroll in education programs or pursue meaningful careers.

Further research is needed into the experiences of Indigenous women in the workplace and barriers that contribute to low pay for, and over-qualification of, Indigenous women in certain industries in Canada.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, academic institutions, research bodies, civil society, private sector organizations, and social support organizations.**

- 10.2.** [Develop initiatives to support Indigenous women's employment, particularly in male-dominated industries. This could include mentorship programs, childcare support, and targeted training programs.](#)

*(Related to NIES Call to Economic Prosperity 2 and UNDA Article 22)*

Supporting Indigenous women's employment in male-dominated industries is not only a matter of equity but also of economic empowerment and community development. By implementing mentorship programs, providing childcare support, and developing targeted training programs, policymakers and industry leaders can create pathways for Indigenous women to access and thrive in these fields. Such initiatives are crucial in dismantling barriers, promoting diversity, and fostering inclusive growth that benefits individuals, communities, and the broader economy.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, labour and union boards, employment organizations, civil society, private sector organizations, and social support organizations.**

- 10.3.** [Continue the dedicated Indigenous Women's Entrepreneurship Support Fund that offers flexible financial assistance, mentorship, and tailored business development programs as delivered through the network of IFIs. This fund should continue to focus on the unique challenges faced by Indigenous women entrepreneurs](#)

*(Related to NIES Calls to Economic Prosperity 1, 2, 24 and UNDA Article 21)*

Understanding the barriers faced uniquely by Indigenous women is critical in being able to offer tailored entrepreneurial support. Providing grants and low-interest loans that allow Indigenous women to invest in their businesses while accommodating family and community responsibilities, including childcare and eldercare would allow Indigenous women to balance pursuing entrepreneurial activities and family priorities.

In addition, creating mentorship networks that connect Indigenous women entrepreneurs with successful businesswomen and leaders who can offer guidance and support on how to overcome gender bias and sexism in business will help advocate for Indigenous women in the business realm.

Lastly, government entities and private sector organizations must advocate for and support policies that promote gender equity in economic development programs, ensuring that Indigenous women's voices are heard, and their contributions are recognized.

**Meaningful change in this area is led by: Federal/provincial/municipal/Indigenous governments, Indigenous communities, Indigenous financial institutions, employment organizations, civil society, private sector organizations, and social support organizations.**

## 2019 Gender Specific recommendation requiring additional attention:

### 10.4. Develop/adjust policy and programs to improve employment/income outcomes for women.

*(Related to UNDA Article 21)*

Indigenous women face lower rates of employment in comparison to Indigenous men and the non-Indigenous population. In 2021, the employment rate of Indigenous women (15 years and older) was 49%. This is a 3.1 percentage gap with Indigenous men, a 12.3 percentage gap with non-Indigenous men and a 4.6 percentage gap with non-Indigenous women. This data demonstrates that more work needs to be done to implement strategies and innovative options to increase equity positions and the involvement of Indigenous women in business and decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors.

Increased attention should be given to the education of Indigenous women as borrowers in financial literacy and capacity.

## Strategic Considerations

In addition to the comprehensive recommendations presented in this chapter, it is crucial to highlight several strategic considerations that merit special attention. These recommendations underscore the importance of proactive engagement with stakeholders beyond traditional sectors, such as non-profit organizations, community groups, and grassroots movements. Emphasizing the role of these entities in fostering community resilience and empowerment through targeted initiatives is essential. These recommendations represent innovative approaches that, while not forming part of the core recommendations, are pivotal in shaping a holistic and sustainable policy framework that addresses the challenges facing our communities today.

### Employment and Workforce Development:

1. *Create targeted employment programs for vulnerable groups such as youth, elders, and those with disabilities. Provide tailored support for entry and retention in the workforce.*
2. *Engage Indigenous communities in the co-development, implementation, and delivery of employment programs. Ensure that programs are designed with community input and reflect their needs and priorities.*
3. *Expand remote work opportunities for those living on reserves or in remote areas to*

*infrastructure, economical transportation services to regional centres for job purposes, and training programs in digital skills.*

4. *Promote and enable greater participation in all economic sectors in the wider region.*
5. *Provide annual public reports on the progress and results of individual and collective employment programming and initiatives. Ensure transparency and accountability and continuous improvement of programs.*

#### Self-Determination and Governance:

6. *Recognize and implement the self-determination and jurisdiction of Indigenous communities as directed in the UNDA as a way to foster increased economic development across the core and underlying indicators within this report.*
7. *Continue to advance Indigenous rights and self-determination through Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination Tables (RRIRSD) to promote economic self-determination.*
8. *Adopt the "Self-Determination and Governance Frameworks" to evaluate and enhance a community's level of self-determination. This includes the transition for First Nations from the Indian Act and implementation of, and adherence to, the Inuit Nunangat Policy.*
9. *Promote and enable greater Indigenous health governance and control over health funding, including capital resources.*

#### Economic Development and Infrastructure:

10. *Facilitate and expedite processes to establish urban reserves in a fair and timely manner, through cooperation between federal, provincial and municipal governments, to support Indigenous involvement in major commercial centres.*
11. *Invest in commercial spaces and incubator centres that support Indigenous-owned businesses that create jobs and support long-term economic growth in Indigenous communities.*
12. *Encourage collaboration between provincial and federal governments and other agencies to address the rural and urban housing crisis by leveraging the success of adding 2,190 projects and 4,763 new homes since the last review.*
13. *Support projects in Indigenous communities that reduce reliance on diesel fuel in remote communities by investing in clean, reliable, and affordable energy systems and increase Indigenous involvement and ownership in these projects.*
14. *Implement regional economic development programs that address the unique*

economic conditions and opportunities in different regions. Tailor programs to the strengths and needs of local Indigenous communities.

15. *Invest in new water and wastewater treatment plants and upgrade existing systems to ensure safe drinking water and proper wastewater management in support of lifting the remaining long-term drinking water advisories.*
16. *Continue to build and upgrade health facilities, with a focus on addressing mental health and addiction treatment infrastructure needs.*

## Education and Training

17. *Establish regional, distinctions-based Indigenous educational institutions.*
18. *Develop land-based learning and healing programs that reconnect Indigenous peoples with their traditional lands and practices. These programs can promote well-being, cultural continuity, and environmental stewardship.*
19. *Integrate Life Skills into curricula for Indigenous students: Incorporate life skills, nutrition, workplace ethics, cultural teachings, business concepts, etc. into the curriculum to prepare students for real-world challenges.*
20. *In Quebec, eliminate the French language credit requirement for Indigenous post-secondary students outside of regions where exemptions exist.*

## Accessibility and Inclusion

21. *Create incentives for businesses to address physical accessibility issues.*
22. *Enhance access to quality education for all children, especially marginalized and disadvantaged groups, by addressing barriers such as distance, cost, and socio-economic factors.*

## ANNEX A: Data Gaps, Limitations and Methodology

This progress report utilizes all the indicators and measures from the previous report to maintain consistency with the 2012 baseline report. As a result, some inherent gaps and limitations from the 2019 report persist, though several major limitations have been addressed.

The 2019 report highlighted the need for broader indicators to provide a more comprehensive picture of economic development, specifically recommending the inclusion of infrastructure status, financial vulnerability index, and health indicators. With respect to infrastructure, s end, the NIEDB continues to work towards developing more comprehensive indicators, applicable across distinctions and accounting for variations in geographic location. . The new infrastructure index will evaluate 13 key infrastructure indicators, including connectivity, transportation, energy supply, healthcare, education, water, and housing and will be released separately from the report.

Health indicators are not included in the current report due to the lack of ongoing data tracking for key health indicators across all Indigenous populations in Canada. Future reports will incorporate these indicators as data becomes available. The report includes data disaggregated by sex (female and male) to better understand the gendered impacts of policies and programs on Indigenous communities. At times, the data includes intersectional analysis, highlighting different economic outcomes between Indigenous women and men, and their non-Indigenous counterparts.

Nevertheless, the data is based on binary gender definitions, excluding gender-diverse individuals and limiting the inclusivity of the analysis. Additionally, a comprehensive understanding of gendered impacts on Indigenous communities is hindered by a lack of qualitative data and analysis. This progress report contributes to the growing knowledge and information on gendered socio-economic outcomes affecting Indigenous women and men in Canada.

There are also limitations arising from the different definitions of Indigenous identity groups used by Statistics Canada compared to those used by ISC and CIRNAC. Statistics Canada defines Indigenous identity groups by single identity, whereas ISC and CIRNAC definitions are largely based on the Indian Act/Band membership.

STATISTICS CANADA	INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA (ISC) AND CROWN INDIGENOUS RELATIONS CANADA (CIRC).
<b>First Nations (single identity)</b>	Registered Indians which refers to all persons who reported being a Treaty Indian or Registered Indian.
	Non-Status First Nations (single identity) refers to those individuals who identified as First Nations (North American Indian) only and indicated no registration status under the Indian Act of Canada, with or without membership to a First Nation or Indian band.
<b>Métis (single identity)</b>	Métis (single identity): Métis refers to those individuals who identified as Métis only (no registration status under the Indian Act of Canada, or membership to a First Nation or Indian band.)
<b>Inuit (single identity)</b>	Inuit (single identity): Inuit refers to those individuals who identified as Inuit only and indicated no registration status under the Indian Act of Canada, with or without membership to a First Nation or Indian band.)
<b>Indigenous (multiple identities and other Indigenous)</b>	Indigenous refers to those persons who reported identifying with at least one Aboriginal group, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuit, and/or those who reported being a Treaty Indian or a Registered Indian, as defined by the Indian Act of Canada, and/or those who reported they were members of an Indian band or First Nation.

Limitations that continue to apply to the indicators used in this report include the effects of ethnic mobility, lack of data for certain identity groups for some underlying indicators, historical comparability, and the exclusion of small communities. Ethnic mobility refers to the fluidity among identity group categories caused by individuals choosing to self-identify their Indigenous identity differently from one census to the next. For instance, smaller gaps in indicators between the Métis population and non-Indigenous populations could be attributed to Métis individuals who self-identify as they achieve greater economic success, alongside the growing prominence of the Métis Nation. Additionally, First Nations populations on and off-reserve are not static categories but fluid descriptions, as individuals and families move back and forth. This mobility may confound outcomes as more opportunities are found in urban off-reserve locations. For example, on-reserve First Nations populations may have lower university completion rates because those who studied off-reserve may find employment where they studied.

Regarding historical comparability for the Census, the counts for Indigenous groups, the Registered or Treaty Indian status group, and First Nation or Indian band membership may change over time due to demographic growth, changes in reporting patterns between Indigenous groups and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, differences in the wording and format of questions, legislative changes, variations in the set of incompletely enumerated reserves, and changes to the definition of reserves. Not all underlying indicators analyzed, such as governance, lands and resources, and drinking water quality, had complete data available for all identity groups. Often, data are missing for Inuit and Métis populations. For example, it remains particularly difficult to measure progress in lands and resources for Métis, who lack a land base in every province except Alberta. As different

identity groups have different governance structures, it poses a challenge to find common measures of governance, lands and resources, and drinking water quality to ensure valid comparisons. Currently, the approach allows comparisons between First Nations and non-Indigenous populations.

Further challenges in measuring the quality of governance and control of lands and resources lie in the difficulty of quantifying these aspects. The report uses surrogates recognized to be correlated with capacity in governance and control, such as property taxation status, participation in sectoral governance regimes in the FNLMA, the status of community intervention, and the number of comprehensive land claims and self-government agreements. However, the causal linkages between the measured surrogates and the underlying indicators have not been clearly established. For instance, while the 2012 benchmarking report noted that communities under the FNLMA have better economic outcomes, this could be due to a higher capacity of governance that enabled these communities to become eligible for the FNLMA regime. Additionally, some First Nations that qualify under the FNLMA regime may choose not to exercise their sectoral governance power granted by the regime.

Finally, the availability of data for small communities and access to census takers presents a limitation for many indicators, as they are derived from census data. For example, the Community Well-Being Index omits very small bands (population < 100) and the large Iroquois communities in eastern Canada because the bands do not grant access to census takers. Small communities face additional barriers to economic development, and without considering them, it would be impossible to meet NIEDB's vision of supporting a vibrant Indigenous economy for all Indigenous peoples in Canada.

The NIEDB recognizes that there are several data gaps related to the sources of data used for this report, including: the 2021 Census, CCIB Aboriginal Business Surveys and the Canadian Labour Market Survey.

#### **Census Limitations:**

In terms of longitudinal research, there are data limitations as participation in the Census surveys has been inconsistent across Indigenous communities through the years. This may be due in part to the inability of the Census to have fully reached all Indigenous communities, particularly those in remote or isolated areas. This can result in underreporting or incomplete data for certain regions.

In addition, unlike previous long-form censuses, the 2021 census included a voluntary long-form questionnaire. This can lead to lower response rates and less reliable data, especially among populations that are already underrepresented or harder to reach, such as Indigenous peoples.

The census questions may also not fully capture the complexity of Indigenous identities. For instance, individuals may identify with more than one Indigenous group (e.g., First Nations, Métis, Inuit) or may not identify with the predefined categories provided in the census.

The census might not adequately capture the unique circumstances of specific communities or regions, particularly those with smaller populations or distinct cultural practices.

Lastly, data comparisons over time can be difficult due to changes in census methodologies, question wording, or categories, which can affect the consistency and comparability of data on Indigenous peoples.



The Indigenous participation rate in the 2021 Canadian Census was relatively high. Approximately 97% of Indigenous households were enumerated, either through the census itself or alternative data collection methods. This was comparable to the overall Canadian response rate, which also hovered around 97%. However, some areas, particularly remote and on-reserve communities, had lower response rates, impacting the completeness of the data for these populations

### **CCIB Aboriginal Business Surveys**

The most recent CCIB surveys, including the "Community and Commerce: A Survey of Aboriginal Economic Development Corporations" and the COVID-19 Indigenous Business Surveys (Phases II and III), provide valuable insights but also face several limitations.

The sample size in these surveys can be limited, potentially affecting the generalizability of the findings. For instance, the "Community and Commerce" survey involved 50 senior executives from Aboriginal economic development corporations (EDCs) across Canada. While this provides a useful snapshot, it may not fully represent the diversity of experiences across all Indigenous businesses.

The surveys often focus on specific aspects of Indigenous business, such as financial performance, community benefits, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This targeted approach can leave out other critical areas such as long-term economic strategies, cultural influences on business practices, and detailed sectoral analyses.

The data collection methods, which include telephone interviews and online surveys, may not fully capture the nuances of Indigenous business operations or the challenges they face. In-person data collection, though more comprehensive, was limited due to pandemic-related restrictions.

The timing of the surveys, particularly the COVID-19 Indigenous Business Surveys, means that the data is influenced heavily by the pandemic's impact. This context can skew perceptions and might not reflect long-term trends or post-pandemic recovery.

### **Canadian Labour Market Survey**

The Canadian Labour Market Survey, like many large-scale surveys, has several data gaps that can affect the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the information it provides. One significant gap is the underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples, which can lead to an incomplete picture of their employment status, challenges, and successes. Additionally, there is a lack of detailed sub-categories distinguishing between different Indigenous groups, such as First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, and their specific labour market experiences.

Geographical coverage is another area with notable gaps. Limited data from remote and northern communities results in a lack of understanding of regional disparities and the unique challenges faced by these populations. Moreover, there is an insufficient distinction between urban and rural areas, affecting the ability to accurately assess and address the unique labour market conditions in these regions.

The survey also falls short in capturing data on the informal and gig economy. There is a lack of comprehensive data on informal employment, which is a significant part of the economy for some

groups, including many Indigenous people. Similarly, there is insufficient data on the gig economy and non-standard employment forms, such as freelance, temporary, and contract work, which are becoming more prevalent.

The survey also focuses primarily on short-term data, lacking longitudinal data that tracks individuals over time to understand long-term employment trends and career progression. In terms of sector-specific data, there is inadequate information on emerging sectors such as green jobs, digital technology, and other innovative industries, which are increasingly important in the labour market. There is also insufficient focus on traditional sectors significant to Indigenous peoples, such as fishing, hunting, and trapping, and how these sectors intersect with modern economic opportunities.

Finally, there is limited data on structural barriers to employment, such as discrimination, systemic racism, and other forms of exclusion that affect certain populations disproportionately. There is also insufficient information on the availability and effectiveness of employment support services, such as training programs, childcare, and transportation, particularly for marginalized groups.

### **IEPR Methodology:**

#### ***Gap Closure Models:***

The document uses both instantaneous and longitudinal models to estimate the economic benefits of closing the education, income, and employment gaps for First Nations. The instantaneous model suggests immediate financial and employment benefits, while the longitudinal model projects long-term benefits up to 2041.

#### ***Theoretical Framework:***

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory is applied to understand the prioritization of needs among Indigenous populations. This theory is used to argue that addressing basic physiological and safety needs, as well as the effects of intergenerational trauma, is essential before Indigenous individuals can focus on higher educational attainment.

#### ***Quantitative Data Analysis:***

Most prominently, statistical analysis of various indicators, including high school completion rates, income levels, and employment rates, is conducted to identify and quantify gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

#### ***Longitudinal Data Comparison:***

Comparison of data over different census years (2006, 2016, and 2021) to track changes and progress in high school and post-secondary completion rates among different Indigenous groups.

#### ***Case Studies:***

Specific examples, such as the success of the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey schools in Nova Scotia, are used to illustrate the positive impact of Indigenous control over education and the implementation of culturally aligned curricula.

## Methodology for the Indices:

### Deriving the Community Well-Being Indices

The calculation of CWB scores

CWB scores range from 0 to 100, with higher scores representing better socio-economic well-being. Overall CWB scores are the average of the community's education, labour force activity, income and housing scores, rounded to a whole number (e.g., 35.741 becomes 36).

CWB scores for 1981 to 2021 are available for every census subdivision (referred to as a 'community' in this presentation) in Canada that was enumerated in the Census, had a census population of at least 65, and did not fail a census confidentiality rule for income. In 2021, 607 of 1,066 First Nations communities and 50 of 75 Inuit communities received an overall CWB score compared to 3,725 of 4,020 non-Indigenous communities.

Education component score:

This component consists of two variables: High School Plus and University. High School Plus accounts for two thirds of the score and represents the proportion of a community's population, 20 years and over, that has obtained at least a high school certificate. University accounts for one-third of the score and represents the proportion of a community's population, 25 years and over, that has obtained a university degree at the bachelor's level or higher. The score is multiplied by 100 to express as a percentage, and is calculated as follows:

*Education score*

$$= \frac{200}{3} \left( \frac{\# \text{ people aged 20 \& older with at least a high school certificate}}{\text{number of people aged 20 \& older}} \right) + \frac{100}{3} \left( \frac{\# \text{ people aged 25 \& older with a bachelor's degree or higher}}{\text{number of people ages 25 \& older}} \right)$$

**Labour Force Activity component score:**

- This component is the average of two rates: the labour force participation rate and the employment rate. The labour force participation rate represents the proportion of a community's population, aged 20-64, that was involved in the labour force during the week preceding Census day (i.e., census reference week). The employment rate is the percentage of a community's labour force participants,

aged 20 to 64, that were employed the week preceding census day. The labour force activity score is also expressed as a percentage, and calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} & \textit{Labour force activity score} \\ &= \frac{100}{2} \left( \frac{\# \textit{ people aged 20 to 64 in the labour force}}{\textit{ number of people aged 20 to 64}} \right) \\ &+ \frac{100}{2} \left( \frac{\# \textit{ people aged 20 to 64 who are employed}}{\# \textit{ people aged 20 to 64 in the labour force}} \right) \end{aligned}$$

**Income component score:**

This component is defined in terms of total income per capita. Calculation of a community’s income score is accomplished in three steps: i) every dollar of income received by community members is divided by the total population of the community to create per capita income; ii) per capita income is transformed into its logarithm to account for “the diminishing marginal utility of income” - those who occupy lower income strata benefit more from additional income than those at higher income levels; and iii) The income score is converted to a scale of 0-100 similar to what is done to other components of the index.

To do this, a ‘theoretical range’ of \$2,650 to \$75,000 for per capita income was established. The theoretical range has increased through various iterations of the CWB, to account for inflation. Before taking the logarithm, per capita income below \$2,650 is replaced by 2,650 and per capita income above \$75,000 is replaced by 75,000. The income score is calculated as follows:

$$\textit{Income score} = \left( \frac{\textit{Log}(\textit{income per capita}) - \textit{Log}(2,650)}{\textit{Log}(75,000) - \textit{Log}(2,650)} \right) \times 100$$

**Housing component score:**

This component is the average of two indicators - housing quantity and housing quality. Housing quantity is the proportion of the population living in dwellings that contain no more than one person per room (i.e., “not crowded”). The ratio of persons to rooms is calculated by dividing the number of household members by the number of rooms in the dwelling they occupy. Housing quality is the proportion of the population living in dwellings that are not in need of major repairs. This score is expressed as a percentage:

$$\text{Housing score} = \frac{100}{2} \left( \frac{\# \text{ people living in dwellings having no more than one person per room}}{\text{total number of people in the community}} \right) + \frac{100}{2} \left( \frac{\# \text{ people living in dwellings that are not in need of major repairs}}{\text{total number of people in the community}} \right)$$

#### Overall CWB score calculation:

The final calculation of an overall CWB score is the simple average of the four component scores, expressed as a number between 0 and 100 and where all four components have equal weighting.

$$\text{CWB} = \left( \frac{\text{Income score} + \text{Education score} + \text{Housing Score} + \text{Labour force activity score}}{4} \right)$$

#### Deriving the National Indigenous Economic Development Board Indices

### Methodology for NIEDB Indices

The NIEDB Indices provide composite scores to track how the core and underlying outcomes for the Indigenous population have compared with the non-Indigenous population, as well as how overall outcomes have compared by consolidating all outcomes into a single index number for each population heritage group.

The core indicators focus on economic outcomes by tracking key employment and income measures. The underlying indicators track factors that directly contribute to improving economic outcomes for Indigenous people. These factors focus on measures of entrepreneurial activity, education and indicators of infrastructure conditions that can each influence economic outcomes in terms of employment success and earnings potential. Index scores were developed to assess changes in socio-economic outcomes among population groups. The index score for a population group is a single number that ranges from a low of 0 to a high of 100. The components and the indicators used in the derivation of these indices are described below.

#### Core Indicators Index

##### 1) Income

The Income component is derived using the median total income for a population group. Median total income is based on the midpoint of the distribution of total income per capita.

##### 2) Dependency on Government Transfers

This component consists of the following measure of dependency on government transfers:

- Proportion of Income Received from Government Transfers: The proportion of income received by the population 15 years and older from government transfers.

### **3) Employment**

The Employment component is composed of the following indicators related to labour force activity:

- Labour force participation: The participation rate for a particular group is the total labour force in that group in the week prior to census day, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that group.
- Employment: The employment rate for a particular group (age, sex, marital status, geographic area, etc.) is the number of employed persons in that group in the week prior to census day, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that group.
- Unemployment: The unemployment rate is expressed as a percentage of the labour force unemployed in the week prior to census day.

## **Underlying Indicators Index**

### **1) Education**

The Education component is composed of the following three measures:

- High school Completion: the proportion of a group's population that has obtained at least a high school certificate.
- College/Trades Completion: the proportion of a group's population that has obtained a college, trades or other non-university certificate.
- University Completion: the proportion of a group's population that has obtained a university certificate, diploma or degree.

### **2) Entrepreneurship**

Self-employment is used as an indicator of entrepreneurship activity by a population group:

- Self-employment: Proportion of workers who are employed for themselves, or work without pay for a family business. While many self-employed individuals work alone, many are owners of small businesses and may employ paid workers.

### **3) Housing**

The Housing component comprises the following indicators of housing quantity and quality:

- Housing quantity: the proportion of the population living in crowded housing categorized into dwellings that have a shortfall of one or more bedrooms.
- Housing quality: the proportion of the population living in dwellings in need of major repairs.

## **Annex B: The Economic, Political, and Legal Context**

In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's was mandated with investigating the problems and offering solutions affecting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. RCAP's ultimate focus was on ways of improving a variety of relationships – Indigenous, government and Canadian society. Through a vast array

of research involving critical Indigenous input – unique to that point- 440 recommendations were made for a grand plan that if embraced, was predicted to have transformational positive change for all.

A 20-year review of the RCAP legacy<sup>245</sup> tracked impressive changes and illuminated the continuing deficits in the story of this Nation’s relationships with Indigenous Peoples. To begin, fundamental relational principles set out in the *RCAP* report were validated again – recognition, respect, sharing and responsibility as the means to achieve reconciliation with honour and integrity. Some *RCAP* recommendations were reiterated in the TRC (2015) Calls to Action.

Change has occurred in the type of engagements in resource development with projects being supported by Indigenous equity partners on one hand and on the other, projects being halted because of intense opposition by Indigenous communities and their allies. Change looks different, as underlined by a distinction-based approach to Indigenous issues because of specific rights, interests, and concerns at the national and individual community levels. Acknowledging the need to share and to do so thoughtfully, has meant a shift of resources and support for Indigenous self-governance across the country.

Wahbung argued for a pace of change that was determined by communities, not by the federal governments. The pace and uptake of change is slow for many communities and much quicker and deeper for other communities. This is not unexpected nor unreasonable, but it means that important gaps remain and may stay on the table for a long time. Shifting focus to the 60% plus of Indigenous Peoples living away from their home communities means expanding the narrative by introducing an individual-focused lens to current community-level discussions. The future is bright in so many ways, but it will continue to be a slow slog demanding care and attention of all who are involved with building a Canada that makes sense.

In short, recognition of all as partners with mutual respect and cooperation for laws and institutions is essential. Respect also includes human dignity and an inclusive Canadian culture. Sharing in Canada’s lands, resources with an overall underpinning of honesty and good faith, inserts responsibility into the mix.<sup>246</sup>

Improving the lives of Indigenous Peoples requires a long-term, concerted and consistent effort. The Hawthorn Report in the 1960s recommended that assimilation was not a policy objective to be followed. However, the Government of Canada proposed such a policy in 1969. Indigenous reaction was forceful, and the policy proposal was withdrawn. Indigenous leaders began to put forward their ideas about the development of their communities. Three important Indigenous policy proposals came out of this era: *Wahbung Our Tomorrows* (1971) from the Indian Chiefs of Manitoba, *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972) from the National Indian Brotherhood, and *Principles of Indian Government* (1977) from the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians. The Calder Decision (1973) started a legal conversation about Aboriginal rights and land. The Indian Claims Commission was established in 1969, and the era of addressing claims to land began. *The Dene Declaration of Nationhood* (1975) fostered the use of Nation as a way of engaging with Indigenous political entities.

Since the introduction and withdrawal of the White Paper, the landscape for Indigenous economic development has changed remarkably. The Wahbung approach: mitigate poverty, restore lands, and support Indigenous developed and led comprehensive development plans has been followed consistently by Indigenous leaders. The 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) reinforced these efforts and proposed a fifteen-year concerted effort to address Indigenous poverty as well as the reconstitution and recognition of Indigenous nations.

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<sup>245</sup> Newhouse, D., & Graham, K. (2021). *Sharing the Land, Sharing a Future*.

<sup>246</sup> Newhouse, D., & Graham, K. (2021). *Sharing the Land, Sharing a Future*. Pg. 1-2.

In the 1980s, the policy field was enlarged from a mostly Indian approach to a distinction-based approach based on the constitutionally recognized groups: Indian (now First Nations), Inuit (formerly Eskimo) and Métis. The *RCAP* (1996) report recognized the emergence of Indigenous economies and proposed a support strategy consistent with *Wahbung*.

Federal government support for Indigenous development since the White Paper withdrawal has gradually widened and has come to encompass many of the *Wahbung* elements: support for community developed plans, education, and training initiatives to support improved labour market experiences for Indigenous individuals, resolution of land claims and new treaties with land, self-government, and funding provisions. Support for Indigenous engagement and participation in economic sector support is also part of government policy and programming.

The 2016 *Final Report of the TRC* and the 2019 *Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG)* coupled with the emergence of a new generation of Indigenous leaders has renewed the development effort. An early 1997 report by the Royal Bank of Canada, *The Cost of Doing Nothing*, reinforced a policy approach based on self-determination, consistent with the *Wahbung* Report. It acknowledged that the way forward consisted of concerted action by Indigenous leaders, businesses, and governments.

### **Distinction based approach to economies**

Indigenous economies are now seen as constitutional and based in distinct rights-holding entities: First Nation, Inuit, Métis. A pan-Indigenous approach that doesn't recognize cultures, traditions, histories, lands and legal and/or treaty rights as important foundational elements for development is no longer acceptable. Unfortunately, the largest group of Indigenous Peoples who live outside their home communities, comprising more than 60% of the population have been largely ignored.

### **First Nation specific development**

Many First Nation communities have adopted a nation building approach to economic development. First Nation Councils often have economic development portfolios, and economic development committees responsible for economic development strategy. Some have staff positions focused on economic development. Many have developed economic development corporations to build and own local businesses or foster the development of entrepreneurs. Regional approaches using tribal councils or other collective organizations are often used. Innovative and legislative approaches are being adopted to overcome the limitations imposed by the *Indian Act*.

### **Métis specific development**

Métis organizations and governments across the country developed their own economic development strategies and institutions and their success has been acknowledged in this and previous NIEDB reports. The rise of a distinction-based approach, using Section 35 of the *Constitution Act 1982* has led to the development of Métis and Inuit- specific approaches to Indigenous development. The Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) in two decisions *Powley*, 2003, and *CAP-Daniels*, 2016 affirmed the existence of Métis rights and Métis identity and declared that Métis fall within the definition of Indian, for public policy making purposes. Métis organizations have now entered in MOUs with Canada and several provinces to support Métis governance and Métis- directed development.

### **Inuit specific development**

There is a rich history of development by Inuit leadership for the benefit of their communities often with the support of federal government programs and resource development corporations. Today, Inuit in Inuit Nunangat has adopted a comprehensive approach to economic development: economic development is more than wealth creation. They define economic development as the process of social transformation



that is intended to improve health, education, housing, public safety, and access to land. Inuit development in Nunangat is guided by the Inuit Nunangat Policy and Inuit-Crown Co-development principles.

### **Urban-specific development**

Responding to the continual rise of Indigenous Peoples in urban spaces has lagged behind the response to the needs of those living in Metis settlements, First Nation reserves and Inuit communities. More than half the Indigenous population now live in urban environments. Indigenous Peoples are present in urban spaces as individuals, families, neighbourhoods, and communities. A 1981 Study by Clatworthy at the Urban Institute reported that the economic and social circumstances of urban Indigenous Peoples was significantly lower than the general urban population and that “There appear to be no native organizations with 'political' goals geared specifically to the general urban native population in operation in any of the major western cities.”<sup>247</sup>

A large infrastructure of organizations has emerged over the last half century to advocate for and deliver services to these communities. Much of this infrastructure development is invisible to Canadians and public policy makers. The *RCAP* grappled with how to turn self-determination into self-government for this population. It proposed a ‘community of interest’ approach to the issue. Self-government would focus on important sectors such as education, employment, health and culture.

Overall, the approach was to find a way to support Indigenous individual and family lives in the city rather than communities. Urban Indigenous organizations, initially Friendship Centres, did not abandon the comprehensive approach prescribed by Mino-Bimaadiziwin. The 1981 Ontario Task Force on Native People in the Urban Settings recommended an urban development strategy based on reinforcement of Indigenous identities and culture, fostering of Indigenous community institutions and development of good relationships with urban non-Indigenous government and institutions. The 2011 Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study reported on the existence of long standing urban Indigenous communities, comprised of individuals and families who had no intention of returning to reserve or rural communities. The city was now home, and they were acting to make it hospitable for themselves. Urban communities are now multi-Indigenous cultural spaces.

The federal government provides support for urban Indigenous communities to enable the development and delivery of culturally appropriate programs and services including housing and community infrastructure and to pilot innovative programs and services. Urban Indigenous economic development includes individual for profit businesses as well as a set of emerging Indigenous social economy and social purpose organizations. The National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC) in 2024 hosted an Urban Indigenous Social Economy Forum aiming to support the ‘growth of collective intergenerational wealth and prosperity for urban Indigenous communities, ensuring Indigenous Peoples and communities have access to capital and resources to achieve economic and social prosperity on their own terms.’

Indigenous economic development approaches are also more nuanced. Many now include programs for women and youth. Indigenous women entrepreneurs and business owners are a significant part of economic development initiatives. For example, Indian Business Corporation (IBC) is a First Nations-owned lending organization that provides financing and support to First Nation entrepreneurs in western Canada. IBC nurtures talent with an approach to financial risk rooted in local knowledge and community

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<sup>247</sup> Clatworthy, S. J., & Jonathan P. G. (1981). *Economic Circumstances of Native People in Selected Metropolitan Centres in Western Canada*. The Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg.

experience. Since 1987, IBC has loaned over \$113 million to more than 2500 First Nation entrepreneurs, supporting the creation of 7,000 jobs—over half of which are rural or reserve-based.

One-third of IBC's loan portfolio is invested with Indigenous businesswomen. The IBC Women's Loan Fund was launched in 2016 to level the playing field by expanding access to capital and meaningful business support for Indigenous businesswomen. In their 2022 Dignity Social Finance Report, IBC noted – *We recognize dignity as the right of all people to be appreciated and respected for their own sake, and to be treated ethically. We believe that economic dignity involves those aspects of dignity that link to a person's sense of financial well-being (p. 2)* IBC concluded that Indigenous businesswomen are resilient, resourceful, impactful, and influential.

Indigenous youth (18-39) are a fast-growing segment of the Indigenous population. Their entrepreneurial efforts are an important driver of economic development. Young people developing their businesses sometimes draw on traditional Indigenous values that can foster improved success and survival. There is now a network of programs and organizations that support these efforts. Some are offered by Indigenous economic development organizations like the National Aboriginal Capital Corporation (NACCA) or by universities and colleges like the Indigenous Youth Entrepreneurship Camp hosted by the First Nations University or by private initiatives such as the Martin Family Initiative Indigenous Youth Entrepreneurship Program. Others offer direct support such as the Indigenous program of Futurpreneur Canada.

## Legal Context

Economic development occurs within a context of laws, legislation, policies, and regulations that facilitate the operation of the economy. Indigenous leaders have pushed for changes in law and legislation to enable them to use their lands and resources more effectively for economic development. Over the past half century, Indigenous law has transformed from its narrow 19<sup>th</sup> century focus on protection and exclusion as embodied in the *Indian Act, 1869*. New legislative tools at the regional or provincial level and at the national level through decisions of the SCC are emerging that are designed to support self-determination and Indigenous self-governments and by extension provide the means to improve the quality of life for Indigenous Peoples.

In 1969, the idea of Indigenous rights, or Indian rights were not part of the public policy discourse. This changed with the Calder Decision (1973) which gave rise to the recognition of Indigenous claims to land and brought to the public attention the manner in which Indigenous Peoples had been treated legally by the Canadian state. The Indian Land Claims Commission began a long process of ensuring that the treaty provisions, previously largely ignored, were fulfilled. In 1990, The Supreme Court in the Sparrow decision began to use the standard 'honour of the crown' to interpret treaties.

The Supreme Court decision in the Calder case (1973) was notable for recognizing that Aboriginal title has important legal implications although the claim by the Nisga'a nation to its traditional lands was denied. The Guerin (1984) decision addressed the Crown's responsibility and obligations to reserve lands which was legally enforceable and included – a duty to consult in good faith. This duty to consult was also noted in Sparrow (1990). Questions not considered involved adequate consultation, compensation for rights infringement and the parameters where infringement by the Crown might be justified.

Consultation by the Crown after these decisions was limited to situations of potential infringement of established Section 35 Aboriginal rights. Claimants had to establish that Aboriginal rights existed and that they had been infringed. This was an arduous and lengthy legal process. Some years later, in 2004 and 2005, three Supreme court decisions – Haida Nation; Taku River Tlingit First Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation shifted onus to federal and provincial governments to exercise their duty to consult in any

situation, where the outcome might infringe on potential or established Aboriginal title, other Aboriginal rights and treaty rights. The imbalance of power between Indigenous Peoples and the state was to be rectified. This fiduciary duty was further developed in the *Tsilhqot'in* decision.

The *Tsilhqot'in* (2014) decision, gave the Nation exclusive right to use and occupy their traditional lands. It also introduced the responsibilities of the province of BC to avoid laws that conflict with this exclusive right – unless proven to be legally justified. For the first time, space is made for provincial jurisdiction that must acknowledge that granting fee simple to land does not extinguish any existing Aboriginal rights or title. Failure to meaningfully consult and accommodate, expose government and industry to expensive damage claims even prior to a successful Aboriginal title claim.

Alongside the duty to consult is the treaty obligation – the honour of the Crown. With sovereignty over lands that were formerly in the hands of Indigenous Peoples, the honour of the Crown is also a constitutional principle that binds the Crown's good faith and honourable dealings to interactions with Indigenous Peoples. Reconciliation and honour drive these relationships according to the Supreme Court which noted in the *Haida Nation* decision (2004) – “the Crown must act with honour and integrity, avoiding even the appearance of sharp dealing” and in *Mikisew Cree* (2018) the honour of the Crown was emphasized as the standard for Crown behaviour given that the purpose of section 35 was reconciliation.

It must be noted that the Supreme Court affirmed the existence of Métis rights under Section 35 for the first time in the *Powley* (2003) case. It also outlined a process for determining legal Métis identity that relied on individual self-identification that was confirmed by membership with an existing Métis community that has recognized historic ties. Métis harvesting rights and practices were confirmed but limited to eating harvested food but not to selling it.

Further Section 91(24) Métis rights under the Constitution were defined in the *Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP)/Daniels* (2016) decision that held that Métis and Non-Status Indians were “Indians.” The court acknowledged that reliance on the noblesse oblige by the parties on the Crown was no longer acceptable and this decision was both practical and clarified the obligation of the Crown under the Constitution. The Federal government provides funds to Métis organizations as they develop structures to support governance and financial accountability and advance reconciliation.

Courts have not figured in defining Inuit/Crown relationships, which have relied on negotiation. This on-going process overseen by the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee has resulted in a framework for development based on co-management that complements the Inuit Nunangat Policy.

The issue is one of Indigenous autonomy – self-government, self-determination and sovereignty. The goal is for Indigenous nations to exercise their inherent jurisdiction over their lands. Modern treaties through the comprehensive land claims processes have offered a way forward for those groups without treaties - a means to finally access needed land and capital to fulfill unique community aspirations. Twenty modern treaties and four stand-alone self-government agreements with Treaty Peoples set out rights and responsibilities and cover the territories and six provinces making up 40% of Canada. The honour of the Crown drives full and fair implementation of these agreements.

Beginning with the James Bay and Northern Quebec agreement, comprehensive land claims allowed control to shift to Indigenous communities – marking renewed nation-to-nation and government-government relations. Those agreements with Quebec and northern communities that were negotiated prior to 2000 lacked self-government provisions that became integral to subsequent agreements. Joint management of resources, land and wildlife rights, compensation, forms of local government and support for languages and cultures were included along with provision for implementation plans. Clarity and certainty were sought in these sophisticated documents.

Modern treaties in the north resulted in the creation of Nunavut, allowed the Inuvialuit to benefit from oil and gas exploration in the Mackenzie Delta and three other NT communities to secure their own interests. Eleven Yukon communities entered into modern treaties that also included self-government resulting in wide jurisdiction and province-like powers. This noteworthy shift away from extinguishment of rights in the early agreements occurred with the majority of modern treaties confirming Indigenous rights.

Other dedicated self-government agreements have been settled in British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and Manitoba. The Nisga'a Final Agreement in 2000 was the first settlement reached in BC. This was followed by several other agreements including Westbank First Nation's agreement that has helped provide stable, transparent, and effective governance for their citizens and non-member residents. With lands assessed at over \$1 billion, the Nation has own-source revenues from real property and sales taxes that contribute to the economic, social, and cultural health of their community. An advisory council composed of non-member residents offer input to Nation laws that directly affect their lives and help to strengthen its model of governance.

Evidence exists that points to a system that has evolved over the past five decades in reaction to shifts in national and international changes in politics, values and understanding. Now, ministerial oversight committees and forums are held regularly with individual committees struck for each agreement.

Numbered treaties negotiated in Ontario, the prairies, BC, and the north were not about surrender of title but instead were about establishing respectful and beneficial relationships for the signatories. Specific claims based on issues of land disposition, unfulfilled terms, administration of treaties and the *Indian Act* were often settled through negotiation that brought land and compensation to these communities that supported their economic goals. Interpretation of these historic treaties remains relevant today and lies at the heart of court cases involving the Robinson treaties (1850) – Robinson-Huron and Robinson-Superior. Claims rest on 137 years of increased production values that arguably should have increased annuity payments due the treaty beneficiaries but weren't. Millions or billions of dollars are at stake.

Another treaty right that is being revisited are the Marshall decisions. Van der Peet (1996) refined the definition of Aboriginal rights in a case regarding fishing – it is a right that does not include trade -the sale of fish. Criteria for defining Aboriginal rights were offered whereby the right is integrally linked to culture. Fishing rights were also addressed in the Marshall decisions (1999) which upheld First Nations' treaty rights to fish, hunt and gather and introduced the standard "pursuit of a moderate livelihood" impacting Mi'kmaq and Maliseet First Nations in Quebec and the Atlantic. The second Marshall decision several months later, further urged the Crown to consider fairness – economic and regional – when regulating commercial fishing. Tensions run high since conflicts erupted between commercial fishermen and First Nation communities in the region, in the fall of 2020. Responsible self-government includes the treaty right to govern First Nation fisheries sustainably and in safety while commercial harvesting organizations want one set of rules for the industry with room for their views to be considered.

Considering case law obligations and potential costly consequences of development impacting Indigenous lands, some industry sectors have increasingly relied on Impact Benefit Agreements and MOUs since 2000. Recent government policies also support these collaborations that often address community concerns, create project certainty, with shared benefits from natural resource development projects including – hydro, mining, oil and gas. Local training and employment, equity opportunities and land use provisions are common in these agreements. Of note, the Tlicho Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement (2003) stipulates that major mining projects within traditional territory must include a formal IBA. Inuit Impact and Benefit Agreements are also becoming common in the north, beginning with the Labrador Inuit Land Claims (2005) that restricts any development unless there is a signed agreement.

Attention to the provisions of *UNDRIP* is growing. Protection of Indigenous rights that defend survival, dignity and well-being were recognized by the TRC with *UNDRIP* named as the framework for reconciliation in Call to Action 42 that urged wide government support and implementation. BC became the first jurisdiction to implement *UNDRIP* in 2019 with the Declaration Act, followed in 2022 with release of an Action Plan – a collaborative effort - for its provincial departments. Canada passed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA)* in 2021 and worked with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups on the parameters for the 5-year Implementation Plan which was released in 2023. Corporations have a role to play and those that take Indigenous relations seriously are called to be proactive for greater equality and prosperity for Indigenous Peoples.

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## Annex C: Indigenous Peoples in Canada

In the land now known as Canada, and within the *Constitution Act, 1982*<sup>248</sup>, there are three recognized Indigenous<sup>249</sup> identity groups: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. Each group is tremendously diverse and rich with their own languages and culture, with each population navigating distinct economic landscapes. In this report, we compare data on identity groups that are based on individuals' self-identification in the 2016 and 2021 Census of Population in Canada.

The 2021 Census counted 1,807,250 Indigenous people, accounting for 5.0% of the total population of Canada, up from 4.9% in 2016 (Figure 1). Overall, the Indigenous population grew by 9.4% since the last census. Those who self-identified as First Nations accounted for over half (58.0%) of the Indigenous population, while just over one-third (34.5%) self-identified as Métis and 3.9% self-identified as Inuit. The remaining share of the population were those who self-reported multiple Indigenous identities (1.6%)—for example First Nations and Métis—and those who were part of the Indigenous population not included elsewhere (1.9%).<sup>250</sup> The below figure depicts the regional distribution of the 1.8M Indigenous people across the country. As we can see below, the proportion of Indigenous peoples in

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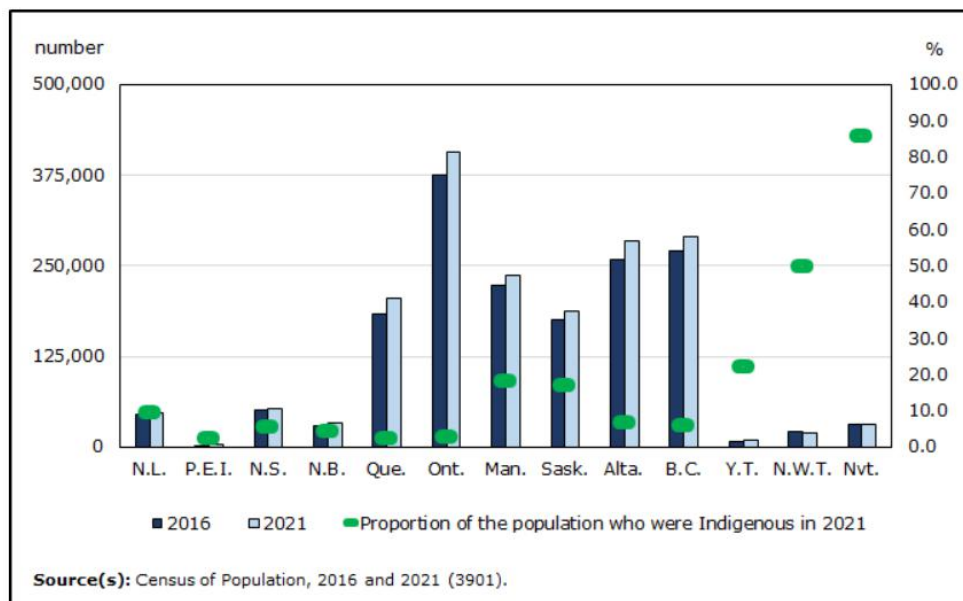
<sup>248</sup> Branch, L. S. (2023, January 19). *Consolidated federal laws of Canada, the Constitution Acts, 1867 to 1982*. Legislative Services Branch. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-13.html>

<sup>249</sup> The term “Aboriginal” is used throughout the *Constitution Act, 1982*, however it is more widely accepted by communities to use “Indigenous” or “Indigenous Peoples”.

<sup>250</sup> Government of Canada, S. C. (2022, September 21). *Indigenous population continues to grow and is much younger than the non-indigenous population, although the pace of growth has slowed*. The Daily. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm>

most of the Canadian provinces have grown and the majority reside in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba.

**Figure 1: Over 1.8 million Indigenous people counted in the 2021 Census**



Two new questions were added to the 2021 Census to collect additional information on the Indigenous population—one on Membership in a Métis organization and another on Enrollment under an Inuit land claims agreement. These questions were added to address information gaps identified during content consultations and user engagement following the 2016 Census.<sup>251</sup>

### First Nations

“First Nations” is a general term to describe many diverse Indigenous communities in Canada. Distinct from Inuit and Métis people, most First Nations hold reserve lands and members of the nation can live on and off these reserves. Reserve lands represent a small fraction of the regions that First Nations lived and hunted on before European contact. There are reserves in every province in Canada, but few have been established in the territories. Most reserves are rural, though some First Nations have created urban reserves, which are reserves within or near a neighbouring city<sup>252</sup>.

<sup>251</sup> Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. (2022, March 30). *Indigenous Peoples Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021*. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/98-500/009/98-500-x2021009-eng.cfm>

<sup>252</sup> *Reserves in Canada*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. (n.d.). Retrieved May 4, 2023, from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/aboriginal-reserves>



Map of Canada depicting the tree line (dashed). Map from <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/indigenouseconomics/244/chapter/chapter-1-indigenous-peoples-of-canada/>

Traditionally, First Nations people lived south of the tree line, and mainly south of the Arctic Circle. The tree line is the edge of the habitat at which trees are capable of growing. Beyond the tree line, most trees cannot tolerate the environmental conditions (usually cold temperatures, extreme snowpack, or associated lack of available moisture).<sup>253</sup>

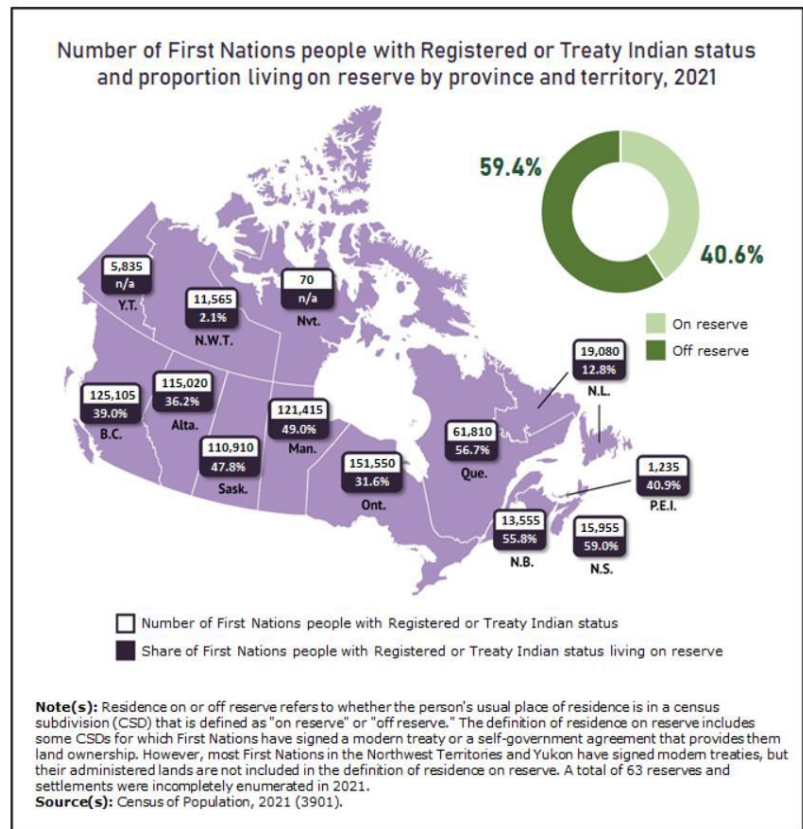
There are currently 634 registered First Nations communities in Canada, with more than half of them in British Columbia and Ontario. Members of various nations more frequently identify by their tribal or national identity only, in recognition of the distinct nations, languages and culture.

<sup>253</sup> Elliott-Fisk, D.L. (2000). *The Taiga and Boreal Forest*. In Barbour, M.G.; Billings, M.D. (eds.). *North American Terrestrial Vegetation* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-55986-7.

**Figure 2: First Nations Proportions**

The 2021 Census counted 1,048,405 First Nations people living in Canada, marking the first time that the First Nations population surpassed the 1 million mark in a census. This is a 9.7% increase from 2016. Among the First Nations people with Registered or Treaty Indian status, 41% lived on reserve and 59% lived off reserve.

While more than half (55.5%) of all First Nations people lived in Western Canada, Ontario had the largest number of First Nations people provincially (251,030), making up nearly one-quarter (23.9%) of the First Nations population in Canada. Meanwhile, one in nine First Nations people (11.1%) lived in Quebec, and 7.6% lived in Atlantic Canada (Figure 2).



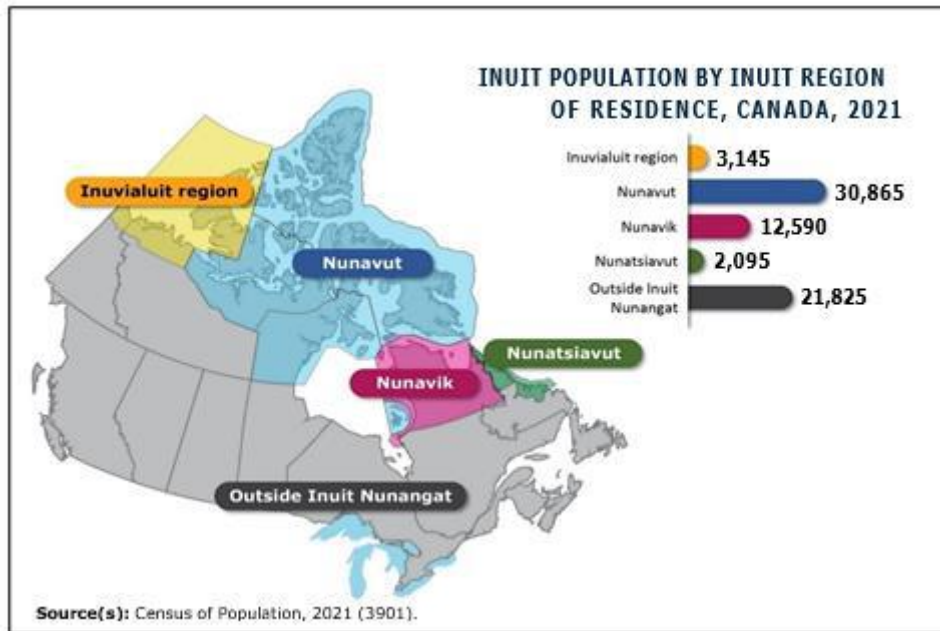
### Inuit

Inuit, Inuktitut for “the people”, largely inhabit the northern regions of Canada. An Inuit person is known as an Inuk. The Inuit homeland is recognized as Inuit Nunangat, which refers to the land, water, and ice in the Arctic region. This homeland is made up of four regions: Inuvialuit Settlement Region, in the western Arctic; the territory of Nunavut; Nunavik, in northern Quebec; and Nunatsiavut, in northern Labrador.

For the four regions of Inuit Nunangat and the area outside Inuit Nunangat, the numbers of Inuit are presented as follows: the Inuvialuit region at 3,145; Nunavut at 30,865; Nunavik at 12,590; Nunatsiavut at 2,095; and outside Inuit Nunangat at 21,825 (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Inuit Population by Region**



The census counted 70,545 Inuit living in Canada in 2021, up 8.5% from five years earlier. Nunavut is home to largest Inuit population in Canada (69.0%), while the number of Inuit living outside Inuit Nunangat are on the rise. The Inuit population living outside Inuit Nunangat grew at a faster pace than the population within the Inuit homeland (+23.6% versus +2.9%) but still more than two-thirds of Inuit live in the Inuit Nunangat.

### Métis

The term Métis is defined by the Métis National Council (MNC) as a specific community of people, which comprises distinct Métis communities developed along the routes of the fur trade and across the Northwest within the Métis Nation Homeland. This Homeland includes the three Prairie Provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta), as well as parts of Ontario, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and the Northern United States.<sup>254</sup> Additionally, in the MNC definition, “Métis’ means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation.”<sup>255</sup>

While Statistics Canada has continued to use the method of self-identification as a measure of Indigeneity, the 2021 Census sought to further understand Métis self-identification through questions regarding registered membership in a Métis organization or Settlement. This includes organizations that are a signatory under the Canada-Métis Nation Accord of 2017 (Métis Nation of Ontario, Manitoba Métis Federation, Métis Nation – Saskatchewan, Métis Nation of Alberta, Métis Nation British Columbia) or one of the eight Metis Settlements established by the Alberta Metis Settlements Act in 1990 (Buffalo

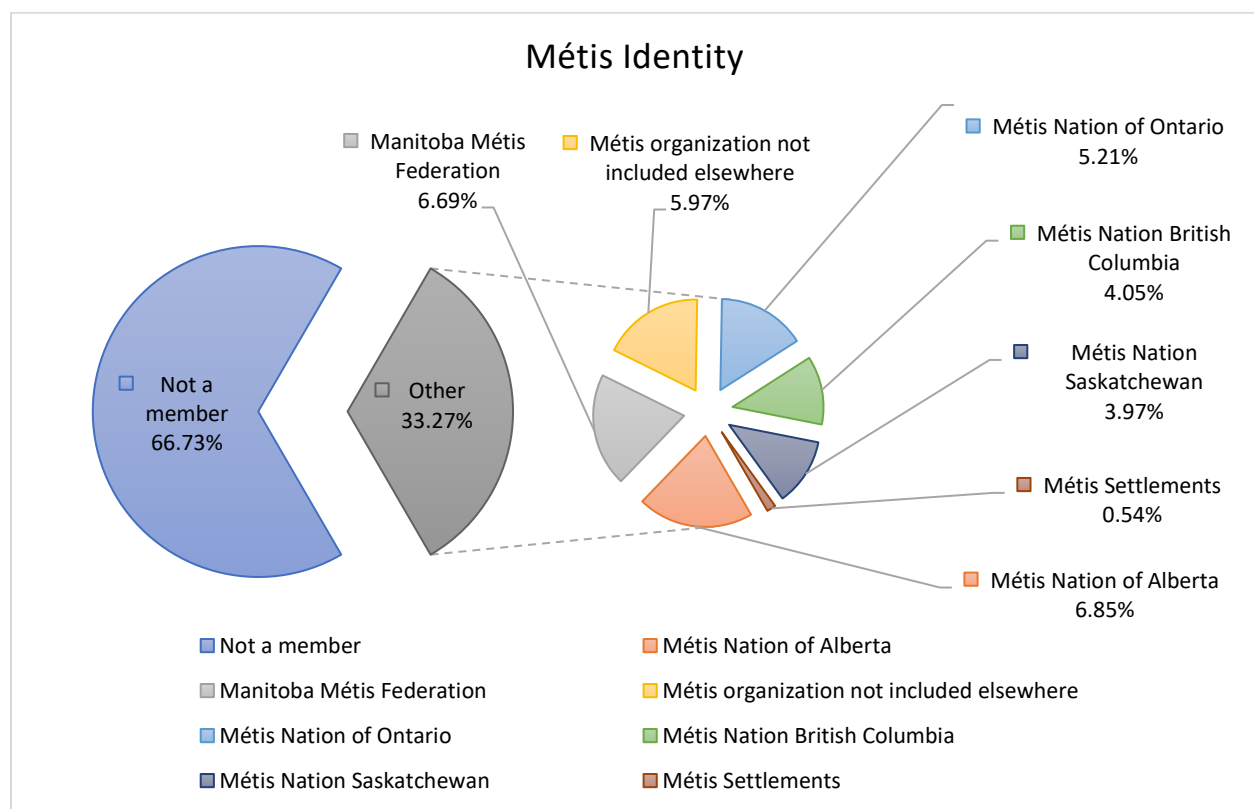
<sup>254</sup> Métis National Council. (n.d.). *Citizenship*. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://www.metisnation.ca/about/citizenship>

<sup>255</sup> Métis National Council. (n.d.). *Citizenship*. Retrieved February 27, 2023, from <https://www.metisnation.ca/about/citizenship>

Lake Metis Settlement, East Prairie Metis Settlement, Elizabeth Metis Settlement, Fishing Lake Metis Settlement, Gift Lake Metis Settlement, Kikino Metis Settlement, Paddle Prairie Metis Settlement, Peavine Metis Settlement).<sup>256</sup>

The 2021 Census counted a total of 624,220 self-identified Métis living in Canada, up 6.3% from 2016. Of that total, 224,655 people (33.27%) reported membership in a Métis organization or settlement (Figure 4). Prior to 2021, the census did not differentiate between self-identified Métis who were members of a Métis organization or settlement and those who were not, potentially confounding and distorting results. The 2021 Census has provided the opportunity to assess the progress of distinct Métis populations with greater data resolution. While the growth of the Métis population outpaced that of the non-Indigenous population (+5.3%) over the same period, the difference was not as great as in years past. From 2011 to 2016, the Métis population grew by almost one-third (+30.0%).

**Figure 4: Métis Identity and Membership**



## A Young and Growing Population

Over multiple decades, census data has consistently revealed that the Indigenous population in Canada is growing at a pace far surpassing that of the non-Indigenous population. From 2006 to 2016, the 2019

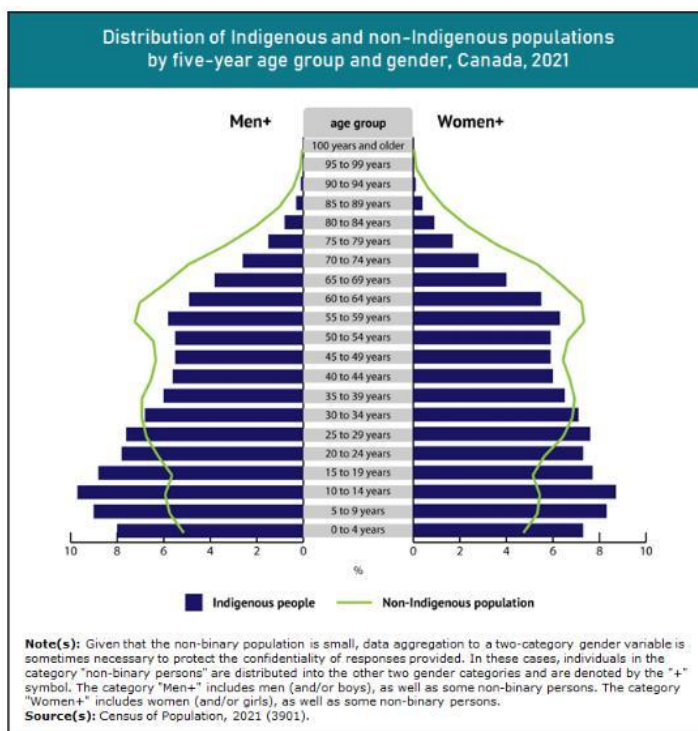
<sup>256</sup> Government of Canada, S. C. (2022, June 17). *Membership in a Métis organization or settlement of person*. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DEC&id=1224717>

*Indigenous Economic Progress Report* indicated a 42.5% increase for the Indigenous population, which was more than four times the growth rate of the non-Indigenous population.

The Indigenous population grew by 9.4% from 2016 to 2021, almost twice the pace of growth of the non-Indigenous population. Population projections for First Nations people, Métis, and Inuit suggest that the Indigenous population could reach between 2.5 million and 3.2 million over the next 20 years.

The growth of the Indigenous population can also be viewed over a longer period. For example, from 2006 to 2021, the Indigenous population grew by 56.8%, or nearly four times faster than the non-Indigenous population during the same period (+15.4%). The Métis population grew by 60.7%, the First Nations population grew by 54.3%, and the Inuit population grew by 40.1%.

**Figure 5: Distribution of Populations**



As observed in previous censuses, the 2021 Census showed that the Indigenous population is younger overall than the non-Indigenous population (Figure 5). The average age of Indigenous Peoples was 33.6 years in 2021, compared to 41.8 years for the non-Indigenous population. Additionally, with findings from the 2021 Census, almost two-thirds (65.1%) of Indigenous Peoples were of working age (15 to 64 years) in 2021. This is in comparison to the non-Indigenous population, where the proportion of those of working-age near retirement (age 55-65) is the highest it has ever been in recent history. This indicates that Indigenous workers will play a significant role in filling the employment positions of the retiring demographic.

Inuit were the youngest of the three groups, with an average age of 28.9 years, followed by First Nations people (32.5 years) and Métis (35.9 years).

While the Indigenous population continues to grow more quickly than the non-Indigenous population, the difference in growth between the two groups was not as large as it was during previous iterations of the census. Generally speaking, the pace of this growth has slowed. In 2016, Indigenous children aged 4 years and younger accounted for 8.7% of the total Indigenous population, and by 2021 this percentage has fallen to 7.6%.

As stated in the *2019 Indigenous Economic Progress Report*, Canada's aging population will result in a decline in labour-force participation rates and present limitations on achieving economic success. The engagement of Indigenous youth in the Canadian economy continues to be a key factor in advancing the economic growth in Canada.

## Gender Diversity

For the 2021 Census, 'at birth' was added to the question on sex and a new question on gender was included. More insight and analysis are discussed in the Gender-specific analysis sections of this report.

## Urban Indigenous Populations

Statistics Canada indicates that a population centre (POPCTR)<sup>257</sup> has a population of at least 1,000 and a population density of 400 persons or more per square kilometre, based on population counts from the current Census of Population. All areas outside population centres are classified as rural areas. Taken together, population centres and rural areas cover all of Canada.

Population centres are classified into three groups, depending on the size of their population:

- small population centres, with a population between 1,000 and 29,999.
- medium population centres, with a population between 30,000 and 99,999.
- large urban population centres, with a population of 100,000 or more.

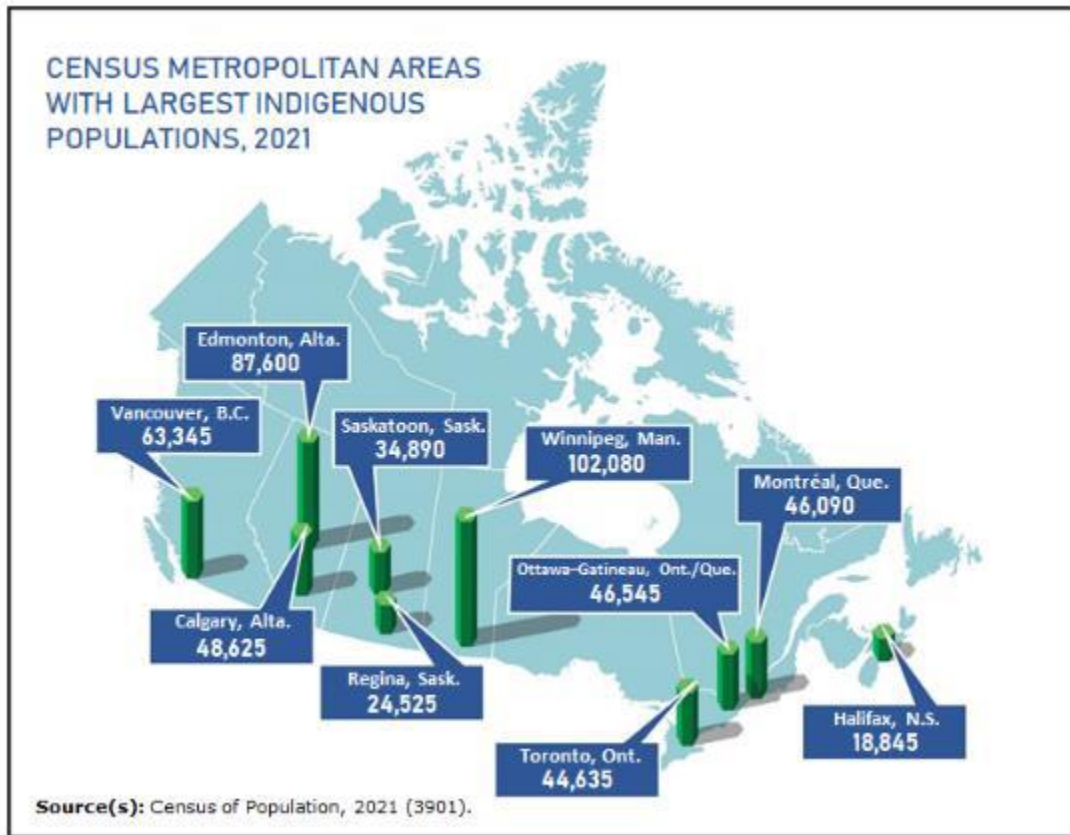
The 2021 Census showed that Indigenous people were more likely to live in a large urban population centre in 2021 than in 2016. Over the five-year period since the 2016 census collection, the Indigenous population living in a large urban population centre grew by 12.5%. Within the total Indigenous population, the share of Indigenous people living in a large urban centre rose from 43.1% to 44.3%. In 2021, Winnipeg had the largest Indigenous population at 102,080 people, followed by Edmonton (87,605) and Vancouver (63,345).

The Indigenous population grew most in Edmonton (+11,400, +15.0%), Montréal (+11,265, +32.4%), and Winnipeg (+8,750, +9.4%) from 2016 to 2021. While the Indigenous population grew in most large urban centres over the same period, it declined slightly in Toronto (-1,685, -3.6%).

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<sup>257</sup>Statistics Canada, *Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021*. Retrieved April 11, 2023, from: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/geo049a-eng.cfm>.

Figure 6: Areas with Largest Indigenous Populations



Although this census shows the growth in urban populations, there is greater insight needed on the impetus behind this growth. City relocation has often been perceived as a search for greater education, more easily accessible services, and more economic opportunities, but several recent studies looking at long-term census patterns indicate that this may not always be the case. Previous demographic studies of the population living on Indian reserves show that this population is growing and that there are more people entering Indian reserves than leaving them (Amorevieta-Gentil et al., 2015).<sup>258</sup> There also research (Clatworthy & Norris (2014)) which found that the people who migrated to Indian reserves came primarily from rural areas, but also from urban areas, and other research indicates that a substantial portion of the migration into and out of Indian reserves is circular in nature.<sup>259</sup>

## Ethnic mobility and Indigenous population growth

The 2019 *Indigenous Economic Progress Report* outlined how shifts in steep population growth have been prompted by court decisions, natural growth, and response mobility. The Indigenous population grew by 9.4% from 2016 to 2021, almost twice the pace of growth of the non-Indigenous population over the same period (+5.3%). Beyond those elucidated in 2019, explanations for this growth may be

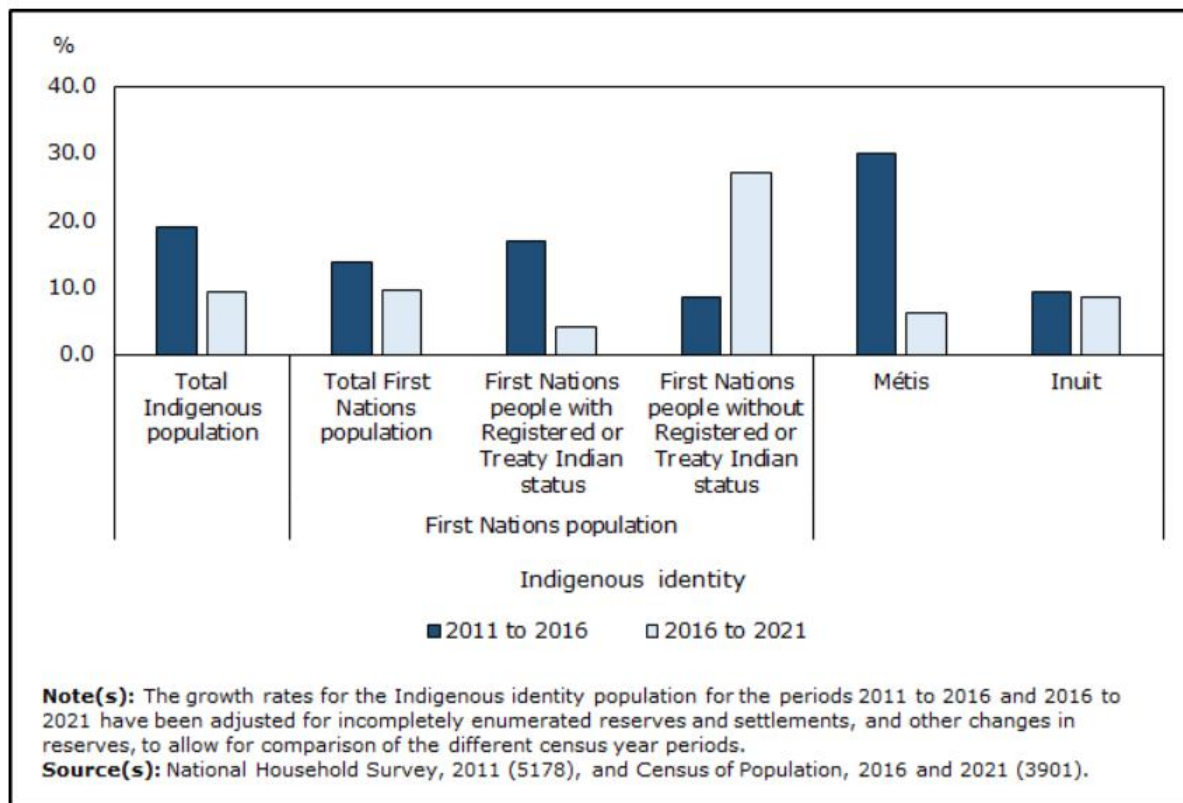
<sup>258</sup> Migration Between Indian Reserves and Off-Reserve Areas: an Exploratory Analysis Using Census Data Linkage Jean-Dominique Morency<sup>1</sup> · Patrice Dion<sup>1</sup> · Chantal Grondin<sup>1</sup> Received: 27 March 2020 / Accepted: 28 February 2021 © Crown 2021

<sup>259</sup> Migration Between Indian Reserves and Off-Reserve Areas: an Exploratory Analysis Using Census Data Linkage, March 2020

further attributed to the way the statistics are gathered and the questions that are used within the surveys, as well as the work done by organizations like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Following the 2016 Census by Statistics Canada, studies indicated that even with a low growth, the projected percentage of the Indigenous population in the overall Canadian population could range from 5.4% to 6.8% in 2041 (compared with 5.0% in 2016). This is a much steeper increase than the non-Indigenous population, despite the fact that the non-Indigenous population would continue to grow due to international migration. Statistics Canada attributed this growth to higher fertility and “changes in the self-reporting of Indigenous identity over a person’s lifetime, with some individuals newly self-identifying as Indigenous in the census, a trend that has continued over time.”<sup>260</sup>

**Figure 7: Population growth slows in 2021 among First Nations people with Registered or Treaty Indian status, Métis, and Inuit, compared with five years earlier**



While the Indigenous population continues to grow more quickly than the non-Indigenous population, the difference in growth between the two groups (+9.4% versus +5.3%) was not as large as it was during previous iterations of the census. For example, the Indigenous population grew at over four times the pace of the non-Indigenous population from 2011 to 2016 (+18.9% versus +4.2%) (Figure 7).

“Natural growth,” relates to higher birth rates and increasing lifespans compared to other populations. “Response mobility,” is an event in which some people report their Indigenous identity or ancestry

<sup>260</sup> Statistics Canada, *Projections of the Indigenous populations and households in Canada, 2016 to 2041: Overview of data sources, methods, assumptions and scenarios*. October 6, 2021.

differently from one data collection period to another. Response mobility may be due to personal reflection, social and/or external factors, such as changes to legislation or court rulings. Experts anticipate this trend will continue to accelerate, and should remain a topic of consideration in future progress reports.

## Statistics Canada's Definition of Indigenous Identity

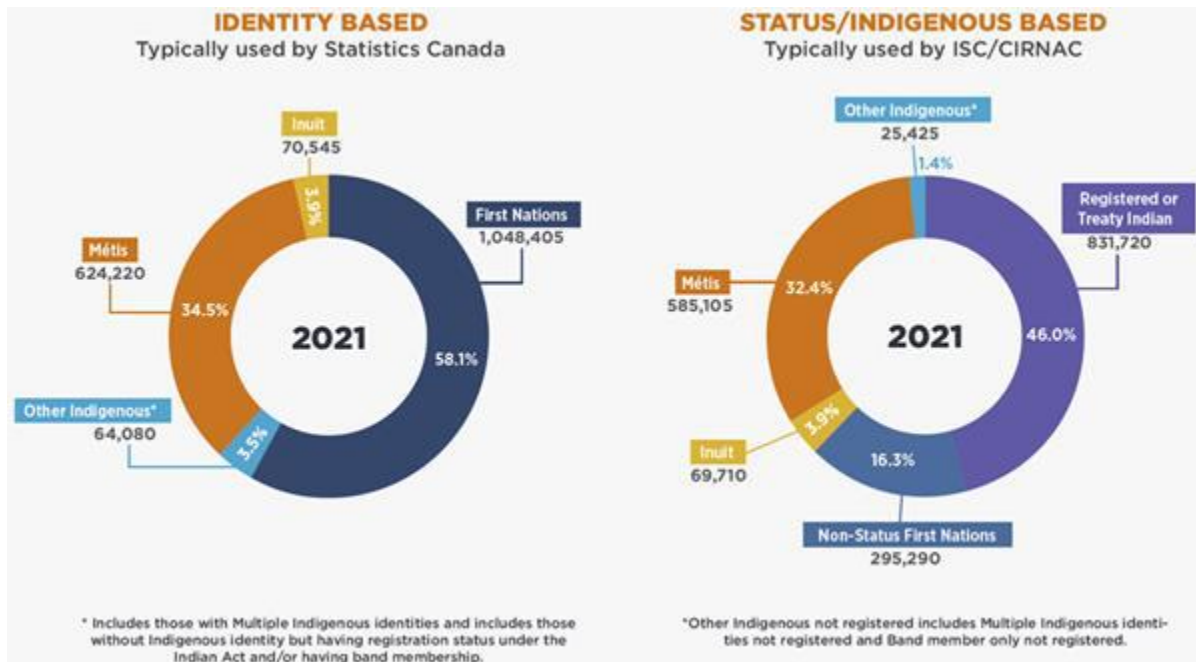
Indigenous identity is self-reported in the Census of Population in Canada, and there is no additional verification process to this data gathering system. This may impact the population figures associated with each identity group. Additionally, within the federal government, there are different ways of interpreting the Census of Population data to establish the overall population of Indigenous Peoples in the country.

Statistics Canada defines Indigenous identity groups by single identity, which refers to individuals identifying themselves as 'First Nations people, Métis or Inuit', whereas Indigenous Services (ISC) Canada and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC) defines Indigenous identity in relation to First Nation band membership. With this approach, ISC then determines whether or not an individual is a Registered or Treaty Indian or if they are Non-Status Indian. These definitions and decisions are developed with respect to ISC's federal departmental mandate towards service provision.

"Registered Indians" are persons who are registered under the *Indian Act of Canada*. "Treaty Indians" are persons who belong to a First Nation or Indian band that signed a treaty with the Crown. Registered or Treaty Indians are sometimes also referred to as Status Indians.

"Non-Status Indian" refers to any First Nations person who is not registered with the federal government, or people who self-identify as Indigenous but who are not entitled to registration on the Indian Register pursuant to the *Indian Act*. There can be many reasons for individuals to have surrendered their status. For example, in the past, Registered First Nations women surrendered their status if they married someone who was Non-Status. The same was true for individuals who pursued higher education or joined the army. The 2013 Federal Court case *Daniels v. Canada (1999)* established that Non-Status Indians (and Métis) have the same Indigenous rights as Status Indians, and that they are encompassed in the *Constitution Act (1867)*.

**Figure 8: Identity-based and Status/Indigenous-based Data**



Source: ISC 2021 Core Table 1, Indigenous Identity-based Designation

Using data from the 2021 Census of Population, Figure 8 illustrates how ISC methodology prioritizes the enumeration of both Registered and Non-Status Indians to identify eligibility for service delivery.

It is important to note that the definition of Indigenous identity outlined by Statistics Canada will be used throughout this iteration of the Indigenous Economic Progress Report, as this has been the benchmarking standard used previously.

## Statement on Indigenous Identity

**Dr. Deborah Saucier and David Newhouse**

*Indigenous business owners, directors of Indigenous companies, and, in the case of co-operatives, voting members need to provide evidence of Indigenous identity as provided by an Indigenous Government or recognized organization, accountable to Rights Holders.*

Reaching 5% and Beyond: A Roadmap to Increasing Federal Procurement from Indigenous Businesses in Canada, CCAB 2021

*Indigenous business owners, directors of Indigenous companies, and, in the case of cooperatives, voting members must provide evidence of Indigenous identity as demonstrated through a legitimate Indigenous identity-issuing organization or entity.*

Defining Indigenous Businesses in Canada, NIEDB, 2022

Indigenous identity fraud, i.e., a non-Indigenous person publicly identifying as an Indigenous person, is a social phenomenon in Canada and the United States of America, negatively impacting Indigenous peoples, communities, businesses, and economic entities.



Recent allegations of Indigenous identity fraud have shed light on the significance of Indigenous identity falsification, including its harms and impacts. Identity fraud affects all aspects of society, including the economic and business sectors. Fraudulent claims of Indigenous identity undermine the trust that is essential for the business and economic sector to operate effectively. They negatively affect the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. It is necessary to ensure that the companies are legitimate Indigenous entities and that benefits directed to Indigenous businesses go to somewhat contrived companies that merely provide “Indigenous” as a label of convenience.

The discussion that is the foundation for developing Indigenous identity/citizenship criteria has considered the identity of individual human beings and has not considered the indigeneity of artificial or legal beings. The Indian Act definitions do not extend to business entities or the Métis citizenship codes. In the economic sector, determining the indigeneity of a business entity is challenging, given the range of business entities that exist and the legislative and legal regulations that define them. Businesses generally have a social license to operate, which attests to their legitimacy and expected behaviour—being defined as Indigenous is an essential aspect of this social license and a foundation for access to benefits designed for Indigenous businesses.

The NIEDB has proposed a series of definitions of Indigenous business entities to assess whether or not a business is a legitimate Indigenous entity. Indigenous businesses must generally have a minimum of 51% Indigenous ownership by Indigenous Nations, organizations, or people. The NIEDB recommended definitions are in Table 1:

**Table 1: Indigenous Business Definitions**

(Source: National Indigenous Procurement Working Group, 2024, NIEDB)

Type of Organization	Definition
Indigenous Corporation	At least 51% of shareholders of the corporation are Indigenous People, groups, or organizations and together have a controlling interest in the company.
Indigenous Partnerships	The partnership agreement defines the Indigenous partner or partners as having the relevant credentials in the industry and/or experience in operating a business, at least 51% ownership, majority of realized economic and monetary benefits, and majority management control.
Indigenous Cooperative	Collectively, Indigenous cooperative voting members must comprise a minimum of 51% of cooperative members.
Indigenous Joint Venture	The joint venture agreement defines the Indigenous partner or partners as having the relevant credentials in the industry and/or experience in operating a business, at least 51% ownership, majority of realized economic and monetary benefits, and majority management control.

Indigenous Sole Proprietorship	The business is 100% owned by an Indigenous person who has sole responsibility for making decisions, receives all profits, claims all losses, assumes all risks, and pays personal income tax (where applicable) on the net income generated by the business, and does not have separate legal status from the business.
Indigenous Micro-Enterprise	See definitions for Indigenous sole proprietorships, partnerships, or corporations.
Indigenous Non-Profit or Not-for-Profit	The composition of the board of directors is at least 51% Indigenous directors. The non-profit mission is focused the betterment of Indigenous peoples or advancement of Indigenous issues.
Indigenous Charitable Organizations	The composition of the board of directors of the Indigenous charitable organization is at least 51% Indigenous directors. The charity's purpose is to benefit Indigenous peoples and communities in a way the law regards as charitable.

**Indigenous Identity substantiation**

For the purposes of determining if a business meets these definitions, they should adopt an evidence-based process for substantiating the Indigenous identity of individuals and businesses. Self-identification without documentation is no longer acceptable.

Indigenous business owners, directors of Indigenous companies, and in the case of cooperatives – voting members, must provide evidence of Indigenous identity as demonstrated by one of the following:

*First Nation Certificate of Indian Status, Secure Indian Status Card and First Nation Citizenship Cards issued by:*

- First Nation as listed on the official Government of Canada website
- Modern Treaty Holders and Self-Governing First Nations in Canada as listed on the official Government of Canada website
- Indigenous Services Canada

*Inuit Beneficiary Cards issued by:*

- Nunavut Land Claim Agreement (Nunavut)
- Inuvialuit Final Agreement (Northwest Territories)
- Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement (Nunatsiavut)
- James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement (Nunavik)

*Métis Citizenship Cards issued by:*

- Métis National Council affiliates (Métis Nation of Alberta, Métis Nation of British Columbia, Métis Nation of Ontario and Métis Nation of Saskatchewan)

- Manitoba Métis Federation
- Alberta Métis Settlement
- Northwest Territory Métis Nation

*Non-Status Indians must be verified through:*

- First Nation recognition of the individual under the First Nation's own Citizenship / Membership Code as verified by the First Nation Membership/Citizenship Clerk.
- Verification in writing of recognized biological lineage to the community from an elected leader of the First Nation along with the Membership/Citizenship Clerk of the First Nation.

## Annex D: Celebrating Success

Across Canada and throughout the pandemic, Indigenous Peoples continue to create innovative socio-economic opportunities for their communities. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities are taking their future into their own hands, exercising their jurisdictional authorities, and strengthening their communities as true Nations. This section highlights regionally diverse success stories from Indigenous Peoples.

### Northern

#### **Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre**

Located on the banks of the Chu Nínkwän, in Whitehorse, Yukon, the Cultural Centre is a place where community celebrates the heritage and contemporary way of life of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

The Kwanlin Dün Cultural Society (KDCS) is a registered not-for-profit organization with Yukon Corporate Affairs. The Governance Council of KDCS was established in September 2013 through the appointment by Chief and Council of Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

The KDCS is an independent governing body responsible for governance and oversight to the management, cultural programming and events of the Cultural Centre. It hosts a wide range of events and celebrations, including the Shakaat Artist Residency Program.<sup>261</sup>

A sense of belonging in community is maintained through cultural activities and resources, which includes the development of Indigenous cultural centres. A centre like KDCS will contribute to improving the overall socio-economic well-being of the community in which it's located.

#### **Nunatsiavut Government and Innu Nation**

In June 2018, Vale, a global mining company, announced a \$2 billion underground mine expansion at the Voisey's Bay nickel, copper, and cobalt mine in northern Labrador. Since 2002, the Nunatsiavut Government and Innu Nation of Labrador have had formal relations with Vale through separate but similar Impacts and Benefits Agreements.

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<sup>261</sup> *Shakaat Artist Residency Program*. Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. (2022, June 28). Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://kwanlindunculturalcentre.com/experience-our-culture/shakaat-2/>

Since the 2018 mine expansion through to the end of 2021, Vale has procured over \$1 billion in goods and services from Inuit and Innu owned businesses and joint ventures.

The benefits of Indigenous procurement and one of the key recommendations of the *2019 Indigenous Economic Reconciliation Report*, are building stronger Indigenous economies and providing opportunities for economic growth and participation.

## Pacific/West Coast

### First Nations Major Projects Coalition

The First Nations Major Project Coalition (FNMPC) is a national 130+ Indigenous nation collective working towards the enhancement of the economic well-being of its members, understanding that a strong economy is reliant upon a healthy environment supported by vibrant cultures, languages, and expressions of traditional laws.

FNMPC is currently providing business capacity support to its members on 8 major projects located across Canada, each with a First Nations equity investment component, and a portfolio exceeding a combined total capital cost of over \$20 billion. FNMPC's business capacity support includes tools that help First Nations inform their decisions on both the economic and environmental considerations associated with major project development.<sup>262</sup>

The FNMPC is a good example of capacity building, wealth sharing, and providing the opportunity for Indigenous business growth in line with Indigenous realities, values, and priorities.

## Prairies

### The Whitecap Dakota First Nation

In 2003, the Whitecap Dakota First Nation signed onto the Framework Agreement on First Nations Land Management to self-govern its lands for 700 members. The following year, the Whitecap Dakota First Nation, along with partners Lac La Ronge First Nation and Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, open the world-class Dakota Dunes Golf Links.

The Dakota Dunes Casino at Whitecap opened in 2007, and in 2011, the community opened a new Health Centre, accessible to all residents in the Whitecap region. Six years later, Chief Whitecap School officially opened in Saskatoon's Stonebridge neighborhood. In 2020, the Dakota Dunes Resort opened and is located on the historical Whitecap Dakota First Nation lands at the height of the South Saskatchewan River Valley Basin.

The Whitecap Dakota First Nation is a modern and progressive First Nation recognized nationally for its economic and community development successes. Whitecap's social and economic success is attributed to its commitment to the spirit of the alliance as many of their projects began with partnerships in the local business community and public institutions.<sup>263</sup>

In May 2023, Whitecap signed a Self-Government Treaty with the Government of Canada that formally recognizes the members as Indigenous Peoples of Canada. The agreement makes Whitecap Dakota the

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<sup>262</sup> FNMPC. First Nations Major Projects Coalition. (n.d.). Retrieved February 2, 2023, from <https://fnmpc.ca/>

<sup>263</sup> Dakota Dunes Resort. (n.d.). Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://www.dakotadunesresort.com/>

first and only self-governing First Nation in Saskatchewan. The First Nation has been negotiating for self-governance since 2009.

The *2019 Indigenous Economic Progress Report* illustrated how strong governance systems contribute to a community's ability to take full advantage of economic opportunities. The Whitecap Dakota First Nation is demonstrative of a community with increased governance independence, enhanced by member-driven strategies which will serve as the required foundation for advancing the overall socio-economic well-being of the community and the broader region.

### **Métis Crossing**

Métis Crossing is the first major Métis cultural interpretive centre in Alberta and is a premier centre for Alberta Métis cultural interpretation, education, gatherings, and business development.

Sitting on 512-acres of land, comprised of river lot titles from the original Métis settlers to the region in the late 1800s, the crossing is designed to engage and excite visitors through an exploration of Métis cultural experiences.



*Cultural Gathering Centre, Métis Crossing, designed by Métis Architect Tiffany Shaw-Collinge. Photo courtesy of the Métis Crossing website: <https://metiscrossing.com/cultural-gatherings/>*

A Cultural Gathering Centre, which was designed by Métis Architect Tiffany Shaw-Collinge from Manasc Isaac Architects, incorporates traditional craftsmanship with modern materials to create a stunning structure which provides of a contemporary place to gather, learn, and share in the richness of Métis stories, language and culture.

Gathering places have great significance in many Indigenous cultures for community members of all ages, especially for Elders and youth. They create a safe space where teaching, learning, ceremony and protocols are upheld, practiced, and preserved. The *United Nations Declaration on the*

*Rights of Indigenous Peoples* recognizes “that respect for Indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment.”<sup>264</sup>

The Cultural Gathering Centre at Métis Crossing upholds this right, and proudly represents elements of Métis culture; pride of culture and respect (with self-identification), family reconnection and reconciliation, sacredness of place and empathy and acknowledgement.<sup>265</sup>

<sup>264</sup> *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, United Nations (2007).

<sup>265</sup> *Métis Crossing: Cultural Heritage Gathering Centre*. Métis Crossing. (2023, February 22). Retrieved February 27, 2023, from <https://metiscrossing.com/>

## Central

### Indigenous Centre of Excellence for Mineral Development

The Indigenous Centre of Excellence for Mineral Development (ICEMD) focuses on research and development of leading practices, information gathering and reporting on various mining initiatives. These initiatives will help build the capacity of Indigenous people with respect to the mining industry in Canada and assist industry and government by supporting increased awareness of protocols for Indigenous engagement, consultation and consent.

ICEMD's mission is to help support the need for capacity in the Indigenous community to become better informed and engaged in the mining industry, where they so choose, and to provide industry, government and Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario with the information, tools and guidance necessary to support Indigenous interests in the mining industry.

The *National Indigenous Economic Strategy* highlights the importance of strengthening labour force markets, and ICEMD's mission is a good example of how to develop supports for organizations that focus on Indigenous skills, employment, and business training.

### Kichiota Indigenous Destinations

In a partnership between Whitecap Dakota First Nation, Wanuskewin, and Beardy's and Okemasis' Cree Nation, Kichiota Indigenous Destinations is a coming-together of peoples and cultures.

With outdoor activities, tours and hospitality and cultural programming, Kichiota adds an immersive, authentic Indigenous experiences to the tourism industry in Saskatchewan.<sup>266</sup>

## Atlantic/East Coast

### Mesgi'g Ugnu's'n

Mesgi'g Ugnu's'n Wind Farm, L.P., is a 50-50 partnership between three Mi'gmaq communities in Quebec (Gesgapegiag, Gespeg and Listuguj) and Innergex Renewable Energy Inc., the entity responsible for the management of the construction and the ongoing operation of the wind farm.

The project created many jobs for both Mi'gmaq and local workers and brought additional business to the wind farm components manufacturers established in the Gaspé Peninsula. Of the more than 300 workers engaged in the development and construction of the wind farm, 110 of them are members of Mi'gmaq communities.<sup>267</sup>

As discussed in the *2019 Indigenous Economic Progress Report*, finding skilled Indigenous workers for the job and retaining these employees on staff is one of the greatest challenges for Indigenous enterprises. Indigenous job creation is at the forefront of being a concrete, effective force for economic reconciliation. It is a steppingstone in breaking down systemic barriers and the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the workforce.

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<sup>266</sup> *Kichiota Indigenous Destinations*. (n.d.). Retrieved February 27, 2023, from <https://www.kichiota.com/>

<sup>267</sup> *Mesgi'G Ugnu's'n*. Innergex. (2022, March 24). Retrieved January 31, 2023, from <https://www.innergex.com/sites/mesgig-ugiusn/>

## Clearwater Seafoods

Clearwater Seafoods was founded in 1976 as a small, local lobster retailer in Nova Scotia. Over 40 years later, Clearwater has grown to become one of North America’s largest vertically integrated seafood companies and is recognized globally for its superior quality, food safety, diversity of species and reliable worldwide delivery of premium seafood.

In 2021, Clearwater was acquired by a partnership between Premium Brands Holding Corporation, a Canadian food company, and the Mi’kmaq Coalition, comprised of seven Mi’kmaq communities in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. Today, Clearwater is proudly Indigenous-owned, committed to creating a sustainable seafood future for generations to come.<sup>268</sup>

It is no surprise that businesses that are fully or partially Indigenous-owned will improve the lives of Indigenous individuals and communities, and in turn will give a valuable contribution to advancing economic development.

## Annex E: Indigenous-owned Companies and Organizations in Canada

### Businesses

Statistics Canada (2020) reports that there are 50,000 Indigenous owned companies who contribute \$48.9B to the economy of Canada. This number is up from an estimated 37,000 Indigenous owned ones in 2018. 94% of these businesses were controlled by First Nations people and Métis. Inuit owned 1.6% of them. Increasingly, Indigenous women are business owners and young Indigenous people are owning businesses at higher rates than non-Indigenous owned businesses.

Indigenous businesses are found in all sectors of the economy as illustrated by the following examples:

Business Name	North American Industry Classification System	Description
Iskwew Air	481- Air Transportation	Established in 2003, Iskwew Air is the first Indigenous women owned airline which provides charter services to communities around BC and scheduled services between Qualicum Beach and Vancouver.
Kautag Construction	236- Construction	Established in 2011, the company operates as a general contractor in the Nunavik region offering design-build services in the residential, commercial, and civil sector.

<sup>268</sup> *Clearwater Seafoods*. (2019, May 28). Clearwater. Retrieved February 2, 2023, from <https://www.clearwater.ca/en/>

One Feather Wallet	541-Professional, scientific, and technical services	Established in 2014, One Feather Wallet is an Indigenous technology company providing Indigenous banking solutions, a truth center for digital Indigenous sovereign identity and data, and election and voting services.
Seven Leaf	4134-Cannabis merchant wholesalers	Established in 2021, Seven Leafannabis producer.

### Indigenous Economic Development Corporations

Indigenous economic corporations’ roles and functions encompass a wide variety of support and advocacy activities. It is important to note that many point to more than two decades of existence. The services provided by these organizations are usually distinctions-based. In some cases, they provide advice to local communities on economic development strategy but also serve as the owner of Indigenous enterprises or economic partners with Canadian businesses or municipalities.

Name	Region	Description
Two Rivers Community Development Centre <a href="http://www.tworivers.ca/">www.tworivers.ca/</a>	Ontario	Established in 1996 its mandate is to provide financing and support to Aboriginal-owned and controlled businesses located in Six Nations of the Grand River and New Credit First Nation.
Waubetek Business Development Corporation <a href="http://www.waubetek.com">www.waubetek.com</a>	Ontario	Established in 1989, Waubetek offers business financing and economic support services to Aboriginal entrepreneurs and First Nation communities located throughout North-Eastern Ontario. A member of the network of Community Futures Development Corporations in Ontario and Indigenous Financial Institutions (IFI) in Canada. Waubetek has also developed regional strategies for Aboriginal participation in mining, fisheries, aquaculture, and tourism.
SaskMétis Economic Development Corporation <a href="http://www.smedco.ca">www.smedco.ca</a>	Saskatchewan	Established in 1987, SMEDCO is owned by the Métis Nation – Saskatchewan Secretariat Inc and is a Métis Capital Corporation. It supports Métis entrepreneurs and Métis communities from all regions in the province of Saskatchewan by providing financing options for



		business start-ups, acquisition, or expansion of viable Métis-owned businesses
Oikiqtaaluk Corporation of Nunavut <a href="http://www.qcorp.ca">www.qcorp.ca</a>	Oikiqtani Region of Nunavut	Established in 1983, it invests in and creates business opportunities, and has grown from a one-person company to a group of companies in fisheries, transportation, telecommunication, hospitality, energy, environment, construction, retail, and real estate.

## Indigenous Finance and Capital Corporations

Indigenous finance and capital corporations (IFI), formerly Aboriginal capital corporations, developed to address the challenges Indigenous entrepreneurs and businesses encounter in obtaining capital for start-up, operations, and growth. They also provide management and operational advice to businesses.

The National Aboriginal Capital Corporation Association (NACCA), formed in 1987, is the umbrella association that brings together more than 50 Indigenous financial institutions in Canada. In addition, Indigenous banks and credit unions have emerged as part of the financing landscape beginning with Peace Hills Trust, owned by Samson Cree Nation, AB, that was started in 1980.

Name	Region	Description
Alberta Indian Investment Corporation <a href="http://www.aiicbusiness.org">www.aiicbusiness.org</a>	Alberta	Established in 1987, AIIC is a First Nation-owned investment company and social enterprise committed to supporting the growth and sustainability of First Nations businesses in Alberta. AIIC provides developmental lending and business services to pursue its vision of First Nations self-reliance and creation of wealth through enterprise
Louis Riel Capital Corporation <a href="http://www.lrcc.mb.ca">www.lrcc.mb.ca</a>	Manitoba	Established in 1992, the LRCC is a Manitoba Métis-owned lending institution created to finance the start-up, acquisition, and/ or expansion of viable Métis-controlled small businesses based in Manitoba.
Nunasi Corporation <a href="http://www.nunasi.com">www.nunasi.com</a>	Nunavut	Established in 1976 as the Inuit Development Corporation, Nunasi's mission is to support the economic well-being of Nunavummiut (its citizens) by growing businesses that contribute to the responsible

		development of Nunavut and the Arctic.
UInooweg <a href="http://www.uInooweg.ca">www.uInooweg.ca</a>	Atlantic	Established in 1986, UInooweg has three divisions: UInooweg Development Group Inc. (a funding and business centre), the UInooweg Education Centre (an education and research charity), and the UInooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation (a charitable foundation). It provides a range of financial and community development services to entrepreneurs, community enterprises, and Indigenous led commercial and charitable projects.
First Peoples Economic Growth Fund <a href="http://www.firstpeoplesfund.ca">www.firstpeoplesfund.ca</a>	Manitoba	In a unique partnership, FPEGF was formed in 2007 with founding members – Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Province of Manitoba. Millions of dollars in funding from the province and NAACA support programs for start-up and expansion of Manitoba First Nations businesses located in the province.

### Indigenous Sector Organizations

Indigenous sector organizations have emerged to advocate and represent Indigenous interests in various sectors of the Canadian economy. Historically these have been in the natural resources sectors and more recently have extended to energy and technology.

Name	Sector	Description
BC First Nations Forestry Council <a href="http://www.forestrycouncil.ca">www.forestrycouncil.ca</a>	B.C. Forestry	Established in 2005, the Forestry Council is an advocacy organization that support Nations in their efforts to increase their role in the governance and stewardship of forest lands and resources, and participation in the forest sector.
First Nations Power Authority <a href="http://www.fnpa.ca">www.fnpa.ca</a>	Energy	Established in 2011, FNPA is an Indigenous governed, not-for-profit development company that bridges the gaps between industry, government, and Indigenous communities to evaluate and develop Indigenous-owned power generation projects.

<p>Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada</p> <p><a href="http://www.indigenoustourism.ca">www.indigenoustourism.ca</a></p>	<p>Tourism</p>	<p>Established in 2015, ITAC represents Indigenous-owned and controlled tourism businesses from across the country. It focuses on marketing, product development support, and creating partnerships between associations, organizations, government departments and industry leaders from across Canada to support the growth of Indigenous tourism in Canada.</p>
<p>First Nations Major Projects Coalition</p> <p><a href="http://www.fnmpc.ca">www.fnmpc.ca</a></p>	<p>Natural resources</p>	<p>Established in 2021, FNMP is a national 145+ collective group of First Nations councils, hereditary Chiefs, Tribal Councils, and Development Corporations. It works to safeguard air, land, water, and medicine sources from the impacts of resource development; advocates for its members to receive a fair share of benefits from projects undertaken in their traditional territories; and explores ownership opportunities of projects proposed in its members' traditional territories.</p>

### Indigenous Economic Support Organizations

Economies are complex institutions and require a mix of knowledge and skills by entrants in order to participate effectively. Over the last three decades, a large set of Indigenous economic support organizations have emerged to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills for economic development.

Name	Sector	Description
<p>Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (Cando)</p> <p><a href="http://www.edo.ca">www.edo.ca</a></p>	<p>Training</p>	<p>Established in 1990, Cando is an Indigenous economic development officer-driven organization focused on training, education, and networking opportunities necessary to serve its community and/or organization professionals.</p>
<p>Alberta Métis Works</p> <p><a href="https://web.albertametisworks.ca/">https://web.albertametisworks.ca/</a></p>	<p>Networking</p>	<p>The Métis Association of Alberta developed an online business directory of Métis owned and verified businesses</p>

		as a tool to connect Métis businesses with procurement opportunities, and to encourage relationships between Métis entrepreneurs within their communities and across the province
National Aboriginal Lands Managers Association <a href="http://www.nalma.ca">www.nalma.ca</a>	First Nations Land	Established in 2000, NALMA provides professional training to First Nations land managers, builds networks for knowledge sharing and alliance building, and provides technical support.
Indigenous Aerospace <a href="http://www.indigenoussaerospace.com">www.indigenoussaerospace.com</a>	Technology	Established in 2021, IA is dedicated to assisting Indigenous peoples' full participation in the remote piloted aircraft system industry by helping to source funding, provide training, and technology for First Nation drone operations.

## Indigenous Post Secondary Education (PSE) Institutions and Academic Programs

PSE institutions (Universities, Colleges, and Indigenous Institutes) have developed a wide variety of academic programs designed to provide foundational skills for Indigenous economic development. These programs range from Indigenous organization-granted certificates to undergraduate degrees in Indigenous economic development and management to graduate level degrees and certificates. Many of these programs are offered in partnership with local Indigenous governments and organizations.

Name	Sector	Description
BA in Indigenous Business and Public Administration	First Nations University of Canada	Established in 1985, this program offers a unique First Nations perspective in the fields of business management and public administration. It offers a balance between theory, conceptual thinking and practical technical knowledge, that is grounded in Indigenous content.
Indigenous Business and Economic Development concentration within the Bachelor in Business Administration degree	Mount Royal University and Old Sun Community College	Established in 2022, the IBED program is a concentration of 10 courses offered by Mount Royal and Old Sun. The program is a shared educational space rooted in mutual understanding and allyship and incorporates an

		Indigenous worldview in development of community-based economic and business acumen.
Summer Biz School	Yukon University	Created in 2021, the Summer Biz School program empowers college and university students (age 17-30) to turn their passions and ideas into real businesses, including up to \$2,000 in funding for business start-up. Students learn the foundations of entrepreneurship by working with local entrepreneurs and have access to a network of seasoned business mentors.
The Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies	Cape Breton University	Established in 2011, the Chair focuses on the research of Indigenous business models, best practices in Indigenous economic development, case studies profiling Indigenous businesses, as well as national and international comparative analysis.
National Consortium for Indigenous Development	University of Victoria	Established in 2014, the mandate of the NCIED is to create sustained programs of research and action in order to maximize conditions for Indigenous economic strength and resilience.

### Canadian Support Organizations

Non-Indigenous economic support organizations, particularly since the 2016 Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have adjusted their programs and services to include distinct Indigenous offerings. Canada’s banks in particular have developed Indigenous services and have created a new banking sector: Indigenous banking.

Name	Sector	Description
Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business	Corporate	Established in 1982, CCAB builds bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, businesses, and communities, with no government funding, through diverse programming that provide tools, training, opportunities for network building, and celebrates success through major business awards, and national events.
CESO now Catalyste+ <a href="http://www.catalysteplus.org">www.catalysteplus.org</a>	Corporate	Established in 1967, Catalyste+ is a Canadian economic development organization. It helps people build

		better lives by strengthening local economies in Canada and in developing countries around the world.
Business Development Bank of Canada –	Indigenous Financing for Entrepreneurs	Established in 1944, BDC helps create and develop strong Canadian businesses through financing, advisory services, and capital, with a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises.
Canadian Federation of Municipalities	First Nation-Municipal Community Economic Development Initiative	Established in 2013, the CEDI, implemented in partnership with Cando, aims to improve the economic prosperity of First Nations and adjacent municipalities through joint community economic development planning and initiatives.

### Advisory Councils

Corporate Canada and the economic support sector have developed Indigenous advisory councils as a strategic initiative to deliver better programs, services and products to Indigenous peoples and to serve as catalysts for innovation and relationship building.

Name	Location	Purpose
Bank of Canada Indigenous Advisory Circle	Ottawa, ON	Established in 2010, the Indigenous Advisory Circle provides advice and recommendations on how Indigenous Peoples in Canada might be represented on future bank notes through the use of symbols, images, patterns and other forms of visual iconography.  Provides guidance to the Bank of Canada Museum on its collections, programs and exhibitions that relate to Indigenous Peoples.
BMO Indigenous Advisory Council	Toronto, ON	Established in 2020 to provide guidance and feedback to BMO to develop policies and practices that respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Call to Action 92.
Timmins Indigenous Advisory Committee	Timmins, ON	Established in 2018 to provide a forum for consultation between Indigenous peoples and the local business and service

		community within the city of Timmins. This forum will work to facilitate a process of reconciliation within the City of Timmins.
ATCO Indigenous Advisory Board	Calgary, AB	Established in 2021, it enhances the way ATCO works and engages with Indigenous partners, assists in developing sustainable economic opportunities for both Indigenous communities and ATCO, and establishes a new global standard for governments and industry that support economic reconciliation, inclusive opportunity and truly equitable partnerships with Indigenous communities.

## International

The emergence of a global Indigenous community is leading to the emergence of international Indigenous organizations that are intended to facilitate trade among Indigenous groups or to ensure that Canadian international trade efforts include Indigenous peoples’ goods and services.

Name	Location	Description
Central Bank Network for Indigenous Inclusion <a href="http://www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/memorandum-understanding.pdf">www.bankofcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/memorandum-understanding.pdf</a>  <a href="https://www.centralbanking.com/central-banks/financial-stability/financial-inclusion/7827511/australia-canada-and-new-zealand-form-network-for-indigenous-inclusion">https://www.centralbanking.com/central-banks/financial-stability/financial-inclusion/7827511/australia-canada-and-new-zealand-form-network-for-indigenous-inclusion</a>	Bank of Canada - Ottawa	Established in 2021, the CBNII aims to share knowledge and best practices, promote engagement with Indigenous Peoples, and foster greater understanding and education about Indigenous economic issues and histories. It supports the Central Bank Symposium on Indigenous Economics.
Indigenous Business Export	Canada, Trade	This program helps open doors and

Support <a href="https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/indigenous_business-entreprises_autochtones/index.aspx?lang=eng">https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/indigenous_business-entreprises_autochtones/index.aspx?lang=eng</a>	Commissioner Services	create opportunities for Indigenous businesses in Canada to successfully expand into global markets.
International and Inter-Tribal Trade and Investment Organization <a href="http://www.iitio.org/">www.iitio.org/</a>		Established in 2014, IITO fosters international Indigenous trade, developed via the tools, mechanisms, and analysis necessary to assist in the global flow and exchange of Indigenous goods, services, and investments.

## Government Support

Government support for Indigenous economic development has broadened from the early support efforts such as the Indian Direct Loan program<sup>269</sup> and CAEDS<sup>270</sup> to whole-of-government approaches. Provincial involvement in Indigenous economic development has increased significantly over the last two decades. Provincial efforts include loan and funding programs, entrepreneur support, and distinctions-based initiatives. One example is described previously and is a partnership between the province of Manitoba and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs through the First Peoples Economic Growth Fund, which the province funds annually for local economic development initiatives.

## Procurement

Governments are large purchasers of goods and services, and their purchases can be a significant stimulant to local economies. In recognition of the need to support the growth of Indigenous economy in Canada, the federal government instituted a set-aside program for Indigenous businesses in 1996 which was meant to encourage successful bidding on their government contracts. Monitoring of actual progress was hampered by lack of consistent program parameters, accountability, and transparency. In 2015, less than 1% of the \$18 billion in federal government contracts to the private sector were awarded to Indigenous businesses.

In 2021, a revamped Procurement Strategy for Indigenous Business was announced that included a 5% target for federal contracts awarded to Indigenous businesses, beginning in 2024. This more accurately reflects the proportion of Indigenous peoples in Canada and was part of a policy of economic reconciliation but cannot be assumed to apply to all contracts equally. For example, there are three types of set-asides – mandatory, voluntary, and conditional, which vary according to the population of

<sup>269</sup> Indian Economic Development Direct Loan Order, SOR/78-22. [www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/regu/sor-78-22/latest/sor-78-22.html](http://www.canlii.org/en/ca/laws/regu/sor-78-22/latest/sor-78-22.html)

<sup>270</sup> Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy, 1989. [publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.908914/publication.html](http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.908914/publication.html)



Indigenous peoples in the contractual area, the specific benefactors of the contract, and the presence of Indigenous businesses that meet the standards for fulfilling the contract.

While there are opportunities for example, to increase employment, own-source revenue and broaden sectoral participation, important challenges affect the rate of participation in securing these contracts and realizing potential benefits. These include size of contracts, the cost of required insurance, and most importantly, the need for capacity-building and supports for these opportunities to be fully realized. The federal government notes that it is focused on meaningful consultation with Indigenous distinction groups in an evergreen process of continually revisiting and revising the procurement process to improve the rate of successful bids by Indigenous suppliers. In the current climate of ‘pretendians’, governments and organizations have moved to define more clearly the characteristics of an Indigenous business to prevent widespread fraud. The National Aboriginal Capital Corporation engaged their members to create definitions of Indigenous sole proprietorship, Indigenous corporation (both for profit and not for profit), Indigenous Cooperative as well as Indigenous partnerships and/or joint ventures.

Provincial and municipal governments often engage in set-asides as well in response to the need to strengthen relationships with Indigenous peoples and businesses. The National Indigenous Economic Strategy calls on all levels of government and industry to support procurement opportunities by creating Indigenous-centered infrastructure to enhance transparency and accountability mechanisms.

Name	Location	Description
National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada 2022 <a href="http://www.niestrategy.ca/">www.niestrategy.ca/</a>	Canada	This National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada is the blueprint to achieve the meaningful engagement and inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian economy. The Strategy is supported by four Strategic Pathways: People, Lands, Infrastructure, and Finance.
Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency <a href="https://www.cannor.gc.ca/eng/1351104567432/1351104589057">https://www.cannor.gc.ca/eng/1351104567432/1351104589057</a>	Canada	Established in 2009, CanNor works with Northerners and Indigenous peoples, communities, businesses, organizations, other federal departments, and other orders of government to help build diversified and dynamic economies that foster long-term sustainability and economic prosperity across the territories – Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon.
EntrepreNorth <a href="http://www.entreprenorth.ca">www.entreprenorth.ca</a>	Northwest Territory	Established in 2018, EntrepreNorth is a project initiative that offers programming to empower Indigenous and community-based entrepreneurs to build sustainable businesses and livelihoods across Northern Canada.
Indigenous Economic Development Fund	Ontario	Established in 2014, the IEDF provides grants and financing to Indigenous entrepreneurs, businesses, communities, and organizations. The fund helps

<a href="https://www.ontario.ca/page/funding-indigenous-economic-development#section-0">https://www.ontario.ca/page/funding-indigenous-economic-development#section-0</a>		promote economic development and improve employment opportunities for Indigenous people.
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## Indigenous Women’s Programs

Indigenous women are important and often overlooked contributors to economic development in Indigenous communities. They are resourceful and have unique skills and knowledge that can help drive economic growth. They are well-positioned to understand and manage natural resources, and their traditional practices and knowledge can help inform sustainable economic development. Additionally, Indigenous women are underrepresented in positions of power and decision-making, and addressing this disparity can lead to more inclusive and effective economic development policies.

Name	Location	Description
#Be The Drum <a href="http://www.nwac.ca/programs/bethedrum">www.nwac.ca/programs/bethedrum</a>	National	Established in 2012, #BTD is an Entrepreneurial Outreach and Navigation Program developed by the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) to improve business, management, and entrepreneurship skills for Indigenous women and gender-diverse people
First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Economic Development Commission – Indigenous Women Entrepreneurship Support Program <a href="https://cdepnql.org/en/blog/launch-of-the-indigenous-women-entrepreneurship-support-program/">https://cdepnql.org/en/blog/launch-of-the-indigenous-women-entrepreneurship-support-program/</a>	Quebec	Established in 2023, this program offers resources dedicated to Indigenous women entrepreneurs.
Inuit Women in Business Network <a href="https://pauktuutit.ca/iwbn/">https://pauktuutit.ca/iwbn/</a>	Inuit Nunangat	Established in 1994, the IWBN connects Inuit women across Inuit Nunangat who own a business or are interested in starting one.  The network supports and assists all Inuit businesswomen at any stage of business development by providing user-friendly resources, and having an encouraging and supportive community
The Shine Network Institute <a href="https://www.shinenetwork.ca/">https://www.shinenetwork.ca/</a>	National	Established in 2020, the Shine Network Institute is an Indigenous not-for-profit organization providing professional development programs,

		advocacy, and mentorship for Indigenous women in the film, television, and media sector.
First Nations and Métis Women’s Councils on Economic Security <a href="https://www.alberta.ca/indigenous-womens-economic-security-councils">https://www.alberta.ca/indigenous-womens-economic-security-councils</a>	Alberta	Established in 2013, the councils provide Alberta government with recommendations on policies, programs and services that can improve the lives of Indigenous women, their families and communities.

### Indigenous Youth Programs

Indigenous youth (generally young people under the age of 30) represent one of the largest demographic groups in Indigenous communities. Increasingly, young people are turning to businesses, either as entrepreneurs or employees or creating social enterprises as careers. Youth support programs provide the knowledge and skills to translate their ideas into businesses.

Name	Location	Description
7 <sup>th</sup> Generation Image Makers NextGEN Entrepreneurship Program for Indigenous Youth <a href="https://nativechild.org/youth/7th-generation-image-makers/">https://nativechild.org/youth/7th-generation-image-makers/</a>	Toronto	Established in 1996, the 7 <sup>th</sup> Gen Program provides urban Aboriginal youth with access to high quality arts programming and professional arts training in a culturally supportive and safe environment.
JA British Columbia Entrepreneurship Program for Young Indigenous Learners <a href="https://jabc.org/indigenous/">https://jabc.org/indigenous/</a>	British Columbia	Established in 2023, this 16-week after-school experience offers a small class setting to guide Indigenous learners through the process of starting and running a business. Topics include concept development, business planning, and effective sales strategies.
Inspire Nunavut <a href="https://www.smalleconomyworks.com/inspire-nunavut">https://www.smalleconomyworks.com/inspire-nunavut</a>	Nunavut	Established in 2015, Inspire Nunavut supports participants in setting their own career or entrepreneurship goals guided by their interests, culture, and community, while connecting

		with like-minded individuals from across Nunavut.
National Indigenous Youth Business Advisory Council <a href="https://nacca.ca/indigenous-youth-entrepreneur/">https://nacca.ca/indigenous-youth-entrepreneur/</a>		Established in 2020, the Council guides and supports NACCA's efforts to learn more about the types of support Indigenous youth need to start and grow successful businesses.

## Annex F: Income Data

Table 1: Average Income (\$)

Year	Indigenous	First Nations Total	First Nations On-Reserve	First Nations Off-Reserve	Inuk (Inuit)	Métis	Non-Indigenous	Difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous
2005	23,889	20,940	15,958	24,519	25,461	28,226	35,872	-11,983
2015	36,043	31,519	23,104	35,536	37,871	42,187	47,981	-11,938
2020	44,920	41,880	32,960	45,360	45,640	49,400	54,900	-9,980
% Change (2020 - 2015)	25%	33%	43%	28%	21%	17%	14%	-16%
% Change (2020 - 2005)	88.0%	100.0%	106.5%	85.0%	79.3%	75.0%	53.0%	-16.7%

Table 2: Median Income (\$)

Year	Indigenous	First Nations Total	First Nations On-Reserve	First Nations Off-Reserve	Inuit	Métis	Non-Indigenous	Difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous
2005	16752	14477	11223	17464	16969	20935	25955	-9203
2015	25526	21875	16907	25134	24502	31916	34604	-9078
2020	34800	32800	26200	34800	33200	39600	41200	-6400
% Change (2020 - 2015)	36.3%	49.9%	55.0%	38.5%	35.5%	24.1%	19.1%	-29.5%

<b>% Change (2020 - 2005)</b>	107.7%	126.6%	133.4%	99.3%	95.7%	89.2%	58.7%	-30.5%
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**Table 3: Percent of Income received by Government Transfers (%)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Indigenous</b>	<b>First Nation</b>	<b>First Nation On-Reserve</b>	<b>First Nation Off-Reserve</b>	<b>Inuk (Inuit)</b>	<b>Métis</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous population</b>	<b>Difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous</b>
<b>2005</b>	18%	22%	29%	19%	18%	14%	11%	7%
<b>2015</b>	17%	21%	30%	18%	18%	14%	12%	6%
<b>2020</b>	26%	29%	42%	26%	26%	21%	18%	8%
<b>% Change (2020-2015)</b>	49%	38%	38%	44%	47%	56%	57%	36%
<b>% Change (2020 - 2005)</b>	-74.00%	-71.00%	-58.00%	-74.00%	-74.00%	-79.00%	-82.00%	-92.00%

**Table 4: Percentage of population in top and bottom half of income distribution (%)**

	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>First Nations</b>	<b>Inuk (Inuit)</b>	<b>Métis</b>	<b>Total Indigenous</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous</b>	<b>Difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous</b>
<b>In bottom half of the distribution</b>	50%	67%	58%	54%	62%	49%	13%
<b>In top half of the distribution</b>	50%	33%	42%	46%	38%	51%	-13%

**Table 5: Low Income Status based on Low Income Measure**

<b>Indigenous identity</b>	<b>Indigenous identity</b>	<b>First Nations</b>	<b>First Nation On-Reserve</b>	<b>First Nation Off-Reserve</b>	<b>Métis</b>	<b>Inuk (Inuit)</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous</b>

<b>Percentage not in low income (after tax)</b>	81.2%	77.3%	68.6%	81.1%	87.2%	83.4%	89.3%
<b>Percentage in low income (after tax)</b>	18.8%	22.7%	31.4%	18.9%	12.8%	16.6%	10.7%
<b>Percentage not in low income (before tax)</b>	76.2%	71.4%	60.9%	75.8%	83.6%	78.8%	86.4%
<b>Percentage in low income (before tax)</b>	23.8%	28.6%	39.1%	24.2%	16.4%	21.2%	13.6%

## Glossary

**AAEDIRP** – The Atlantic Aboriginal Economic Development Integrated Research Program.

**AAFC** – Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

**AAFO** – The federal departments of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

**AFN** – The Assembly of First Nations is the national advocacy organization for First Nations in Canada.

**ANPF** – The Arctic and Northern Policy Framework was co-developed between the government of Canada and Indigenous, territorial and provincial partners as a long-term, strategic vision that will guide the Government of Canada’s activities and investments in the Arctic to 2030 and beyond.

**AFNT** – The Atlantic First Nation Tech Services is a Mi’kmaw Kina’matnewey program that provides technology-related resources and excellence in service to schools and health centers.

**AFOA Canada** – AFOA Canada is a not-for-profit association that helps Indigenous people better manage and govern their communities and organizations by focusing on enhancing management, finance, and governance practices and skills.

**ATRs** – Additions to Reserves are parcels of land added to the existing reserve land of a First Nation or that create a new reserve. ATRs are classified as either urban or rural and fall into three categories: legal obligations, community additions, and new reserves.

**BBF** – Indspire’s Building Brighter Futures: Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards Program.

**CAEDS** – The Canadian Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy was launched by the Government of Canada in 1990 to provide long-term employment and business opportunities to Canada’s Aboriginal citizens.

**Cando** – The Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers is an Indigenous-controlled non-profit society focusing on education and professional development for Economic Development Officers working in Indigenous communities and organizations.

**CAP** – The Congress of Aboriginal Peoples is a national organization that represents the rights and interests of Indigenous People living off-reserve in Canada.

**CCIB** – The Canadian Council for Indigenous Business provides tools, training, network building, major business awards, and national events to build bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, businesses, and communities.

**CCSP** – The Collaboration and Continuity of Services Policy will replace the DPMP when finalized.

**CIRNAC** – The federal department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.

**CMA** – A Census Metropolitan Area is defined by Statistics Canada as being formed by one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total

population of at least 100,000 of which 50,000 or more must live in the core based on adjusted data from the previous Census of Population Program.

**CRGBA** – Culturally Relevant Gender-Based Analysis, a methodology developed by the Native Women’s Association of Canada, considers the historical and current issues faced by Indigenous women.

**CSOR** – The Contaminated Sites On Reserve Program is a national initiative that supports the assessment and remediation of contaminated sites on reserve lands and lands under “the Department’s custodial responsibility.”

**CWB** – The Community Well-Being index measures socio-economic well-being for communities across Canada over time in education, labour force activity, income and housing.

**Deloitte FCC Future of Canada Centre** – The Deloitte Future of Canada Centre aims to help propel Canada into a new age of growth and competitiveness by exploring new ideas, viewpoints, and insights about the country's most important national issues.

**DPMP** - The Default Prevention and Management Policy administered by ISC provides capacity development support to communities experiencing significant governance capacity challenges.

**DWAs** – Drinking water advisories are issued to warn people to not drink water that may be unsafe or is known to be unsafe based on water quality test results.<sup>271</sup>

**EDI (AFN)** – The Assembly of First Nations Economic Development and Infrastructure Branch works to close the socio-economic gap by advancing First Nation jurisdiction and control over program and service delivery in the areas of infrastructure, fisheries, and economic development.

**ESDC** – The federal department of Employment and Social Development Canada.

**EAP** – The Expert Advisory Panel who helped to inform key research questions, methodological needs, sources, and structure for the 2024 Indigenous Economic Progress Report.

**FMB** – The First Nations Financial Management Board is a non-profit, First Nation organization that provide the tools and guidance to support First Nations’ financial management and reporting systems.

**FMS** – The Financial Management System is a certification provided by the FMB indicating that the First Nation uses good governance and financial practices.

**FNA4LM** – The First Nations Alliance 4 Land Management provides a communication link between First Nations land managers, training and expertise in land management and supports a system that will assist First Nations interested in land management function.

**FNFA** – The First Nations Finance Authority is a statutory non-profit organization that provides First Nation governments with investment options, capital planning advice, and access to long-term loans with preferable interest rates.

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<sup>271</sup> Government of Canada. (2021, February 19). *About drinking water advisories*.



**FNFMA** – The First Nations Fiscal Management Act is a modern comprehensive fiscal legal framework that supports fiscal law-making for First Nations.

**FNLMA** – The *First Nations Land Management Act* supports the forty-four land management provisions of the *Indian Act* to enable First Nations to assume control over their reserve lands, develop Land Codes, and hold law-making authority respecting the conservation, protection, management, development, possession, and use of First Nations lands.

**FNMPC** – The First Nations Major Project Coalition is a national non-profit organization established by First Nations for First Nations providing business capacity services free of charge to member Nations.

**FNU** – The First Nations University is a unique Canadian institution that specializes in Indigenous knowledge, providing post-secondary education for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike within a culturally supportive environment.

**FP** – The Financial Performance is a certification provided by the FMB indicating that a First Nation is in good financial health by meeting the standards of financial performance.

**FPIC** – According to the United Nations, FPIC is a principle protected by international human rights standards that state, ‘all peoples have the right to self-determination’ and – linked to the right to self-determination – ‘all peoples have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development’.

**FTE** – Full-time equivalent refers to the unit of measurement equivalent to an employee or student’s one unit of a workday, applicable in a variety of contexts.

**Futurpreneur** – Futurpreneur is a national non-profit organization that provides financing, mentoring, and support tools to aspiring business owners between the ages of 18 and 39.

**GBA+** – Gender-based analysis plus is an analytical tool developed by Status of Women Canada. It is used to identify and trace the potential impacts of policies, programs, and other initiatives on diverse groups of women, men, and gender-diverse people.

**GAC** – The Office of the Chief Economist of Global Affairs Canada.

**HDI** – The United Nations Human Development Index is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living.

**IBC** – The Indigenous Business Corporation is a First Nations-owned lending organization that provides financing and support to First Nations entrepreneurs in Western Canada.

**ICC** – The Inuit Circumpolar Council is an international non-government organization representing the Inuit of Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia).

**ICE** – The Indigenous Clean Energy Social Enterprise is a pan-Canadian not-for-profit platform that advocates for Indigenous inclusion in Canada’s energy future economy.

**ICEMD** - The Indigenous Centre of Excellence for Mineral Development works to help build the capacity of Indigenous people with respect to the mining industry in Canada.

**ICPC** – Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee consists of the government of Canada, ITK, and the four regional Inuit land claims organizations who work together to advance shared priorities, improve prosperity in Inuit Nunangat and strengthen the Inuit-Crown relationship.

**IEPR** – The Indigenous Economic Progress Report is released by the NIEDB to present a thorough, in-depth analysis of the economic realities of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and track progress made to achieve economic parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

**Indspire** – Indspire is an Indigenous national charity that invests in the education of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.

**IPCAs** – Indigenous Protected Areas and Conserved Areas are defined by the Indigenous Circle of Experts for The Pathway to Target 1 as “lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems.”

**IPSES** – The Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy provides funding to Inuit students, led by ISC.

**IRC** – The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation is the governing body for the Inuvialuit Settlement Region.

**ISC** – The federal department of Indigenous Services Canada.

**ITK** – Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami is the national organization protecting and advancing the rights and interests of Inuit.

**JEDI** – The Joint Economic Development Initiative is an Indigenous organization dedicated to supporting Indigenous participation in New Brunswick’s economy.

**KDCS** - The Kwanlin Dün Cultural Society is a registered not-for-profit organization responsible for governance and of the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre.

**KDFN** – Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

**KRG** - The Kativik Regional Government governs the Inuit in the Nunavik region with Makivik Corporation.

**LTDWAS** – Long-term drinking water advisories are those that have been in place for more than one year.<sup>272</sup>

**MBM** – The Market Basket Measure establishes poverty thresholds based on the cost of a basket of food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other items for a family of four that reflects a modest, basic standard of living.

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<sup>272</sup> Government of Canada. (2021, February 19). *About drinking water advisories*.

**MEBO** – The Mi'kmaw Economic Benefits Office is a not-for-profit organization located in Membertou, Nova Scotia advocates for meaningful participation in business opportunities in various sectors while providing people with training for skilled, well-paying jobs.

**MFNERC** – The Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre offers comprehensive services, including education, administration, technology, and language and culture support for 55 schools in Manitoba.

**MK** – Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey serves 12 Mi'kmaq communities in Nova Scotia under *An Agreement with Respect to Education in Nova Scotia* (1997).

**MMF** – The Manitoba Métis Federation is the governing body for the Métis in Manitoba.

**MMIWG** – Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is a National Inquiry that looks into and reports on the systemic causes of violence against Indigenous women and girls.

**MNA** – The Métis Nation of Alberta is the governing body for the Métis in Alberta.

**MNBC** – The Métis Nation of British Columbia is the governing body for the Métis in British Columbia.

**MNC** – The Métis National Council is a collaborative body that represents and serves the interests of the Métis people.

**MNO** – The Métis Nation of Ontario is the governing body for the Métis in Ontario.

**MNPSES** – The Métis Nation Post-Secondary Education Strategy provides financial support to Métis Nation students, led by ISC.

**MN-S** – The Métis Nation of Saskatchewan is the governing body for the Métis in Saskatchewan.

**MP** – Member of Parliament.

**MSGC** – The Metis Settlement General Council is the first and currently the only Métis self-government in Canada, representing eight Métis settlements in northern Alberta.

**MVDF** – The Métis Voyageur Development Fund is a Métis owned and controlled economic development agency whose mandate is to provide funding and support to Ontario Métis businesses.

**NACCA** – The National Aboriginal Capital Corporations Association is a network of over 50 Indigenous Financial Institutions dedicated to stimulating economic growth for all Indigenous people in Canada.

**NAFC** – The National Association of Friendship Centres represents over 100 Friendship Centres and Provincial/Territorial Associations (PTAs) in Canada.

**NAFTA** – The North American Free Trade Agreement was an agreement signed by Canada, Mexico, and the United States that created a trilateral trade bloc in North America.

**NALMA** – The National Aboriginal Land Managers Association is a Canada-wide network that empowers land managers through professional development and technical expertise and incorporates First Nations values and beliefs into land-use planning.

**NCCIE** – The National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education is based at the First Nations University of Canada and serves as an important platform for sharing stories and promoting Indigenous education in Canada and globally.

**NGOs** – Non-governmental organizations.

**NIEDB** – The National Indigenous Economic Development Board is a national, nonpartisan body, mandated to advise all departments from the Government of Canada on Indigenous economic development issues.

**NIES** – The National Indigenous Economic Strategy is the blueprint to achieve the meaningful engagement and inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian economy.

**NIPWG** – The National Indigenous Procurement Working Group was created in collaboration with NACCA to facilitate the creation of Indigenous business definitions for procurement processes.

**NIYC** – The National Inuit Youth Council was established by ITK to provide guidance and input into issues of interest for Inuit youth in Canada.

**NSMA** – The North Slave Métis Alliance is a non-profit society representing Métis from the Northern region of Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories.

**NTI** – Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated is the governing body for Nunavut Inuit.

**NIICC** – The National Urban Indigenous Coalition Council is an advisory table made up of caucus representatives of Urban Indigenous Coalitions from nearly every province and territory in Canada.

**Nutrien** – Nutrien provides crop inputs and services through its world-class network of production, distribution and agriculture retail facilities.

**NWAC** – The Native Women’s Association of Canada is a National Indigenous Organization that defends the rights, delivers programming to, and amplifies the perspectives of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people in Canada, inclusive of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

**NWTMN** – The Northwest Territory Métis Nation is the representative body for the Métis of the South Slave region.

**OAG** – The Office of the Auditor General of Canada serves Parliament by providing it with objective, fact-based information and expert advice on government programs and activities, gathered through audits.

**OECD** – The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development is an international organization working on establishing evidence-based international standards and finding solutions to a range of social, economic and environmental challenges.

**Pauktuutit** – The Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada is the national representative organization of Inuit women in Canada.

**POPCTR** – A Population Centre which is defined by Statistic Canada as having a population of at least 1,000 and a population density of 400 persons or more per square kilometre, based on the 2021 census population count.

**PSSSP** – The Post-Secondary Student Support Program by ISC provides financial assistance to First Nations students who are enrolled in eligible post-secondary programs.

**P-TECH** – The Pathways in Technology Early College High School is a Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey program that enables students to begin their college and professional lives more quickly and with more support than the typical school-to-work pathway.

**RAA** – Recipient-Appointed Advisor is a level under DPMP in which the recipient contracts an advisor as part of their action plan to remedy the default and prevent recurrence.

**RCAP** – The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was mandated in 1991 by the federal government to investigate and propose solutions to the challenges affecting the relationship between Indigenous Peoples, the Canadian government and Canadian society as a whole.

**REA** – Regional Education Agreements provide Indigenous Services Canada funding to First Nations with the flexibility to distribute education funding within their region to support the specific needs of their students, schools, and nation.

**REMP** – The Reserve Land and Environment Management Program is a land-management capacity building program that provides First Nations with the funding, tools, skills, and knowledge required to manage reserve land, resources and environment.

**RLI** – Rupertsland Institute Métis Center of Excellence is an affiliate of the Métis Nation of Alberta with a mandate in education, research and training.

**RM** – Recipient Managed is a level under the DPMP in which the recipient must create a management action plan that is approved by the ISC that remedies the default and prevents recurrence.

**RIRSD** – The Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination Tables are exploratory discussion tables with the Government of Canada on the topics of jurisdiction and core governance.

**Rural Areas** – Defined by Statistics Canada as any territory lying outside of a population centre.

**SCC** – The Supreme Court of Canada is the highest court in Canada's judicial system.

**SMEs** – Small and Medium-sized Enterprises are firms with between 1 and 499 employees.

**TLE** – The Treaty Land Entitlement process allows First Nations who did not receive all the land to which they were entitled under the treaties to file a TLE claim with the Government of Canada. TLE settlement agreements are negotiated between First Nations and the Government of Canada.

**TLO** – Land Titles Office.

**TPFAM** – Third-Party Funding Agreement Management is a last-resort level under DPMP in which ISC contracts a manager to administer the funding for program and service delivery for the recipient community and to remedy the cause(s) for the default.

**TRC** – The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was mandated in 2007 by the federal government to provide those affected by the legacy of the Indian Residential School system with an opportunity to share their stories and experiences.

**UCEPP** – The University and College Entrance Preparation Program provides funding for First Nation students registered under the *Indian Act* and who can maintain a satisfactory academic standing, led by ISC.

**UNDA** – The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* requires the Government of Canada to implement the *UN Declaration* in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples.

**UN Declaration**– The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is a legally non-binding resolution passed by the United Nations in 2007 that delineates and defines the individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**USMCA** – The United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement is the trilateral trade agreement that has replaced NAFTA.

**Yellowhead Institute** – Yellowhead Institute is an Indigenous-led research and education centre based in the Faculty of Arts at Toronto Metropolitan University.

**YESS** – The Youth Employment Skills Strategy supports entrepreneurial skills that equip youth to establish and enterprise and become capable businesspeople.

**YESP** – The Youth Employment and Skills Program funds employment opportunities for youth in the agriculture and agri-food sector.